The Feminine Mystique

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF BETTY FRIEDAN

Betty Friedan was the oldest of three children born to Harry Goldstein, a Russian-Jewish immigrant who worked as a jeweler, and his wife Miriam Goldstein, a Hungarian-Jewish immigrant who worked as a journalist until Friedan was born. Friedan attended Smith College where she studied psychology and graduated *summa cum laude* in 1942. She spent a year at the University of California – Berkeley on a fellowship to pursue advanced work in psychology before moving to New York City in 1943. While there, she worked in a series of odd jobs until meeting Carl Friedan, an aspiring theater producer and advertising executive. They married in 1947. The couple had three children and settled in Rockland County, New York where Friedan became a homemaker and a freelance writer. Her research on *The Feminine Mystique* began during the 1950s when she conducted a survey among her fellow Smith alumnae and found that many of them lived discontented lives as housewives. The publication of the book heralded the arrival of the second-wave feminist movement. Friedan used her influence to pursue the political aims she had adopted in her youth. In 1963, she helped found the National Organization of Women (NOW), for which she served as its first president. She also helped found the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws, renamed the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) after the Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade* (1973). In 1971, she co-founded the National Women's Political Caucus with the Congresswomen Shirley Chisholm and Bella Abzug and the activist, Gloria Steinem. Friedan also pursued the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. She continued to write and engage in women's issues until her death from heart failure in 2006.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Betty Friedan marks the 1940s as the decade in which "the feminine mystique" entered the American consciousness. While men were fighting during World War II, women took over many of the jobs that would have normally gone to men. They were particularly active in the munitions factories that built the weapons and equipment that soldiers needed. Work gave women a sense of purpose and independence, which many of them relinquished to become housewives after soldiers returned home in 1945. With the inclusion of a guaranteed mortgage loan in the G.I. Bill, white soldiers and their wives found it easier to finance their dream homes in the suburbs, where many of them began families. Friedan cites fears over nuclear annihilation during the Cold War as part of the reason why men and women sought the comforts of domesticity in the suburbs. Due to their seclusion in middle-class white suburbia, many women were relatively unaware of desegregation efforts in the South in the 1950s and early 1960s. Those white women who *were* involved in community affairs sometimes led desegregation efforts in their school districts. Such community involvement, coupled with growing awareness among politically-engaged women that they needed their own Civil Rights Movement, led to the development of the second-wave feminist movement, whose beginning was marked by the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. The second-wave feminist movement, which became particularly active in the early-1970s, picked up where the first-wave movement left off. The fight for suffrage had defined first-wave feminism, leading to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, which granted women the right to vote, in 1920. Second-wave feminists protested against discrimination in education and employment and advocated for reproductive rights. The Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), which granted women the right to obtain an abortion in any state, is regarded as a crowning achievement of the second-wave movement.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Feminine Mystique is a sociological study written in the subjective voice that characterized New Journalism—a type of non-fiction writing in which authors included their own voices or made themselves a part of the experience about which they were writing. New Journalism did not merely convey facts, as traditional journalism did, it also included the author's interpretation of and relation to those facts. Other works of New Journalism include Tom Wolfe's *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968) and Joan Didion's study of the 1960s, *The White Album* (1979). Other feminist works that addressed the oppressive conditions that society mandated for women include *The Second Sex* (1949) by the French existentialist philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir, and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970), which went further than Friedan's work in its critique of men, consumerism, and the nuclear family.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Feminine Mystique
- **When Written:** Late-1950s
- **Where Written:** Rockland County, New York
- **When Published:** 1963
- **Literary Period:** New Journalism
- **Genre:** Non-Fiction
- **Setting:** The United States

- **Antagonist:** Sexism and the Feminine Mystique
- **Point of View:** Third-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Smith College. The small, women's liberal arts college in Northampton, Massachusetts graduated several key figures in second-wave feminism. In addition to Friedan, Gloria Steinem—who clashed with Friedan over the role of men in women's lives and the importance of marriage and family—graduated in 1956. Catherine MacKinnon, an anti-pornography activist and law professor, graduated in 1969 and later led the effort to declare sexual harassment in workplaces and schools sex discrimination.

"The Lavender Menace" and Radical Feminism. By the 1970s, Friedan had become a target of criticism among radical feminists who resented her advocacy of marriage and childrearing for women, as well as her wish to exclude lesbians from feminism, an influence that she labeled "the lavender menace." Black feminists, such as bell hooks, criticized *The Feminine Mystique* for its singular focus on white, middle-class women, many of whom were educated, claiming that the lifestyles Friedan described in the book did not mirror those of millions of other women.

PLOT SUMMARY

Friedan begins her study of the lives of presumably white, middle-class women in suburban postwar America through her exploration of the problem that has no name. Friedan first recognized the problem during a visit to her alma mater, Smith College, when she conducted an informal survey among fellow alumnae who reported discontent with their post-graduate lives. She decided to expand her study and noticed that women all over the nation were reporting similar feelings of boredom and dissatisfaction, despite the belief that suburban women had ideal, comfortable lives.

Most women silently bore the problem. Some thought that there was something wrong with them for not being satisfied with their lives. Friedan notes the complicity of the media in promoting the feminine mystique and for blaming women's serious emotional problems on small, mundane matters, such as "incompetent repairmen." Worse, advertisers and women's magazines promoted an ideal of femininity— "the happy housewife" heroine—with which many white, suburban women tried to identify.

The "happy housewife" was an enthusiastic consumer who spent her days in department stores and supermarkets buying the latest appliances and cleaning supplies. Through her interviews with researchers and "manipulators"—advertising consultants who exploited housewives' feelings of inadequacy and boredom to sell them products—Friedan uncovered the ways in which ad firms sought to perpetuate the feminine mystique with the aim of ensuring that housewives, who were the most important American consumers, would continue to buy household products.

Though appliances were designed to reduce the amount of time spent on housework, homemakers still tended to spend more time on housework. Social experiments and studies revealed that housewives were spending excessive time on housework to make up for feelings of boredom and to provide them with a sense of achievement. By turning housework into a job and labeling their "occupations" as housewives, Friedan believed that they were turning chores—tasks that a child could perform—into their life's purpose, to their own detriments.

Women had not always identified as housewives. In fact, they had played from active roles in American life throughout history. Many of the mothers and grandmothers of Eisenhower era housewives had been suffragists who protested for the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, granting women the right to vote. However, history had maligned the reputation of the early feminists, leading their descendants to distance themselves from their images as independent, intellectual, and politically-active women. The early feminists, such as Lucy Stone, had discovered their plights through their work to end slavery. For their activism and dismissal of traditional modes of femininity, they were branded as "man-hating."

In the postwar era, the popularity of Sigmund Freud's theories in psychoanalysis contributed to the view that active, intellectual women were perverse, or suffering from penis envy. Social scientists also reinforced the feminine mystique. Friedan focuses on the work of anthropologist Margaret Mead who based her ideas about gender on functionalism, or the belief that traditional gender roles were necessary to help ensure that men and women served a complementary function in society, just as each part of the body served a function.

Sex-directed educators—that is, teachers, professors, and college administrators—also reinforced the feminine mystique. Instead of encouraging young women to learn to think critically and to pursue serious scholarly work, educators directed women toward courses in home economics and "marriage and family" to help them avoid the risk of feeling maladjusted to their roles as homemakers.

Contrary to the perception that education had ruined women for housework, a majority of female college alumnae who were surveyed reported being very satisfied with their educations in the liberal arts, but they regretted that they had not done anything with what they had learned. To make themselves feel like they were a part of the world, they bought things. When that did not work, they used sex to "feel alive." Many married women reported having affairs. Their husbands also had affairs, both casual and more serious romances, sometimes with female employees in their offices, to escape from their home

lives. The stereotype of "the devouring wife," as sexist as that of "the devouring mother," drove men to seek out affairs with or fantasies of girlish women—Lolita types—who helped them forget about their wives' aggressive demands at home.

The result of the feminine mystique, according to Friedan's research, was not greater satisfaction in marriage or a stronger sense of purpose in the sex-defined role. On the contrary, career women with graduate degrees tended to report higher levels of satisfaction in their marriages, as well as more orgasms. Instead, the "mystique" had led women to forfeit themselves in favor of playing a feminine role. Friedan likens this collective loss of identity to life in a concentration camp. Though Friedan is aware that the analogy is a bit extreme, in her view, the loss of identity among camp prisoners is not unlike that among housewives.

To recover their lost sense of identity, Friedan insists that women must work. This does not mean that women should simply work to support their families, for that would be another way of remaining in "the trap." Instead, they must find work that fulfills them. She also insists that paid work is best, for it communicates to women that they have value.

Friedan offers other solutions for women in recovering their identities, particularly the necessity of giving up their status as "housewives." Women, she writes, should see housework for what it is—chores to get out of the way as quickly and easily as possible. She also advocates for colleges offering course programs designed for women who have been out of school for many years, as well as maternity leave and child-care programs that would allow women to keep employment while still caring for their children.

In the epilogue, Friedan examines how her own life changed as a result of the publication of the book. She had planned to go back to school to get a PhD. She experienced isolation and suspicion in her Rockland County, New York suburb when the other wives and mothers realized that she had embarked on a career as a writer. In 1969, tired of telling other women to empower themselves without following her own advice, she divorced her husband. In the following year, she helped co-found the National Organization for Women (NOW) and served as its first president. She also helped to organize the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL) and campaigned for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), in addition to a number of other political causes.

In contemplating her ability to overcome her fear of flying, she realized that when a person found one's purpose in life, they no longer feared death. The oppression of women had resulted in a lot of energy that had been "locked up" in outmoded gender roles, which prevented women from finding their true purposes. Friedan saw the sexual revolution of the late-1960s and early-1970s as an opportunity to free both men and women.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Sigmund Freud – A Viennese neurologist who developed the theory and practice of psychoanalysis. The popularity of psychoanalysis in postwar America, particularly its explanations of female behavior, led many women suffering from the problem that has no name into the offices of psychiatrists. Friedan argues that Americans had adopted the bad habit of reading Freud literally and of making the mistake of applying his Victorian ideas to their era. Penis envy (Freud's notion that little girls who could not accept their lack of a penis grew into women who tried to compensate for that lack by pursuing masculine interests, such as careers) validated the feminine mystique and convinced women who did not conform to it that they were perverse.

Betty Friedan – The co-founder of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the organization's first president. Friedan was a feminist activist and sociologist whose first book, *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, signaled the initiation of the second-wave feminist movement. Although she primarily writes in the third-person and makes herself scarce in the analysis she conducts, her writing is often classified as part of New Journalism, a type of non-fiction writing in which authors included their own voices or made themselves a part of the experience about which they were writing. Friedan draws on her own experiences in her writing—but not her personal experiences so much as her experiences as a researcher. In the book's epilogue, she turns to focus more on her own life as a married woman, former homemaker, and feminist activist. In this way, Friedan makes it clear that she is writing about the experiences of white, middle-class American women not from the outside looking in, but very much from the inside—as she herself is embedded in the world of the housewives about which she writes.

Margaret Mead – A noted anthropologist, Mead studied gender and sexuality in primitive civilizations and applied some of her findings to American society. Mead, like many social scientists in the postwar era, validated traditional gender roles through her application of the theory of functionalism to her studies. Friedan is critical of Mead for the ways in which Mead's functionalist views effectively reinforced the feminine mystique and sent women back into the home in the years following the war.

Lucy Stone – An abolitionist and campaigner for women's rights. Stone was born in western Massachusetts and attended Oberlin College where she was forbidden from studying public speaking, so she practiced by herself in the woods. Stone, like other feminists had the reputation of being a "big, masculine woman" who wore boots, smoked a cigar, and swore like a sailor, but she was quite dainty in-person. Despite her initial

objections to marriage, she married the reformer and suffragist, Henry Blackwell. Though she mentions most notable nineteenth-century American feminists, Friedan focuses on Stone as an example of a self-reliant woman who discovered her own desire for equal rights through her effort to free slaves. Stone was vilified in media, but she became an inspiration to other women who later joined the movement for suffrage.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Alfred Kinsey – An American biologist, zoologist, and sexologist who founded the Kinsey Institute at Indiana University. Friedan draws on Kinsey's broad-based research into the marriage and sexual behavior of Americans both to observe the impact of the feminine mystique on men and women and to challenge traditional conceptions of gender.

TERMS

Bloomers – An outfit which consisted of "a tunic, a knee-length skirt" and "ankle-length pantaloons." Women often wore bloomers when cleaning the house, but some feminists began to wear them in public, instead of wearing their usual ankle-length skirts and petticoats, as a sign of their emancipation. The image of feminists in bloomers led to ridicule from newspapers and perpetuated the belief that feminists wanted to be men.

The Career Woman – Also referred to as "**the New Woman**," the career woman was an independent, ambitious type who found fulfillment both in her work and in her romances. **Friedan** uses examples from short fiction in women's magazines to illustrate the contrast between the career woman, a character in popular fiction in the 1920s and 1930s, and the housewife, the exemplar of womanhood after 1942, who had been convinced by the feminine mystique that she had to choose between marriage and a career. If she did work, it should only be in the service of her family. For advertisers in the 1940s and 1950s, the career woman was a consumer who disliked housework and was interested in getting a job outside the home. Her presence in the market presented a threat, due to her being less likely to buy appliances.

The Castration Complex – According to Freudian theory, the moment in a boy's psychosexual development when he notices the girl's lack of a penis, which he had originally attributed to everyone, and equates her lack of a penis with having been castrated, that is, having had the penis cut off. The sense of being "castrated" is a symbolic loss that has less to do with the actual fear, in the case of the male, of losing the penis, and more to do with the loss of a unified sense of identity.

The Devouring Mother – Borne from **Freud's** notion of penis envy, "the devouring mother" compensates for her lack of a penis by having a son, then devotes all of her energy toward his care and the satisfaction of his every wish. The "devouring mother" is co-dependent and "consumes" her children, particularly her sons, emotionally and psychologically. She seeks fulfillment through her children because the feminine mystique has convinced her that her identity is inseparable from her roles as wife and mother. **Friedan** uses the female protagonists from Tennessee Williams's plays as exemplars of the archetype. As Southern women, they are particularly devoted to the feminine mystique. Their relationships with their sons reflect a love-hate due to their sons' needs for self-actualization as well as their guilt over becoming independent of their needy mothers.

The Devouring Wife – A play on the Freudian concept of "the devouring mother," "the devouring wife" is a housewife who seeks to use her husband's life and accomplishments to supplant her own lack of professional accomplishments. The housewife who does not live vicariously through her husband's career actively pursues a "home career," resulting in aggressive and domineering behavior around the household that mirrors that of "the devouring mother."

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) – A federal agency, founded July 2, 1965, one year after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, that enforces civil rights laws against workplace discrimination. The EEOC hears complaints regarding discrimination on the basis of race, sex, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, disability, and ethnicity. It also hears cases of discrimination against children.

Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) – A proposed amendment that declared "equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." In 1972, the ERA passed Congress and was sent to the states for ratification. The original seven-year deadline for ratification had been extended to 1982, but it was ratified by only thirty-five states instead of the thirty-eight that were needed.

Functionalism – The study of institutions from a fundamental perspective, or in terms of their "structure" or "function" in the society. Social scientists relied on functionalism to describe and justify socially-conditioned male and female behavior as a natural function of each sex's social role.

Feminist – The women who fought for suffrage (suffragists), equal political rights, and the right to own property from the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries. In the twentieth-century, they fought against discrimination in education and employment, for reproductive rights, and for access to state-funded childcare. Friedan includes historical American feminist characters such as **Lucy Stone**, whom she uses as an exemplar, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Julia Ward Howe, Angelina Grimke, and English feminists, such as Mary Wollstonecraft.

The Happy Housewife Heroine – **Friedan** uses this label to

describe the image of the housewife created by women's magazines, starting in 1942, though, the term could also describe the idealized image of housewives promoted by advertising firms. The "happy housewife" heroine accepted her traditional feminine role and sought fulfillment through being a wife and a mother. In some stories, she was contrasted with the career woman who represented a threat to proper modes of femininity.

The Housewife – **Friedan** focuses on the life of the American housewife after the Second World War. The American housewife was, presumably, a white, middle-class woman who lived in the suburbs. Some of them had graduated from college, while others left midway through, and others still had only attended high school. The American suburban housewife was believed to be an object of envy, for, she had a house, two cars, and a lot of purchasing power, which included her choice of appliances and supermarkets. Friedan observed through her research, which began during a survey of fellow alumnae at Smith College, that women who had become housewives were quietly suffering from the problem that has no name

Lolita – A name taken from the title of Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel of the same name to describe a passive, child-like woman who offers herself to men sexually while demanding nothing in return. In the book, Lolita is a prepubescent girl who becomes an object of erotic obsession for Humbert Humbert, the pedophilic protagonist. Friedan uses the name as a metaphor for "a girl-child" and a "sexual object" who serves as an escape from the "grownup woman" to whom a man is married. The "Lolita" type is the antithesis of "the devouring wife" who "[devotes] all her aggressive energies, as well as her sexual energies, to living through [her husband]."

The National Organization for Women (NOW) – An American feminist organization founded in 1966 in response to the need to enforce Title VII. **Betty Friedan** served as the organization's first president, but it was organized by Friedan, black lawyer and Civil Rights leader Pauli Murray, and the black union organizer and EEOC commissioner, Aileen Hernandez, who served as NOW's second president from 1970-1971.

Penis Envy – According to Freudian theory, the stage in female psychosexual development when a girl realizes that she does not have a penis. "Envy" of the penis results in female subjects who develop anxiety over their lack of the male appendage. A woman with penis envy looks for ways to compensate for her supposed physical inferiority by taking on "masculine" characteristics, such as ambitiousness or intellectualism.

Psychoanalysis – A field of psychological theory and therapy developed in Vienna by the Austrian neurologist, **Sigmund Freud**, in the 1890s. Psychoanalysis studies unconscious and conscious processes of the mind, as well as how those processes intermingle, to uncover repressed fears and address them. Psychoanalysis does not promise cures for a patient's problem but provides the language to help the subject recognize the problem.

The "Symbiosis" Concept – Biologically, 'symbiosis' is the process by which two organisms become one organism. As a psychological concept, 'symbiosis' refers to the psychological or emotional bonding between mothers and children. The mother, according to psychologists, should provide constant loving care, just as she provided constant nourishment and a safe environment for the fetus in the womb, until the child is ready to be "psychologically born," or became more independent. This process is to last for "an indeterminate number of years." The concept contributed to the notion that mothers and their children "retain a mystical oneness" and "are not really separate beings."

Title VII – An amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that forbids discrimination in employment based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin or ethnicity.

The Woman Question – A phrase used during the Victorian Era to refer to the changing position of women in society and what their new roles would be, as a result of social change and their growing political power. Reform bills in British Parliament addressed the question in the 1860s. Philosopher John Stuart Mill, for example, introduced an amendment to the Second Reform Bill of 1867 in Parliament which would have granted female property owners the right to vote.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

DOMESTICITY AND FEMININITY

The central problem of *The Feminine Mystique* is the prevalence of American women in the post-World War II era who identified as housewives, not only viewing themselves in relation to their husbands and children, but also seeking personal fulfillment through their performance of tedious and repetitive housework. Domesticity had created what Friedan calls a "trap" that prevented women from growing into fully self-actualized individuals with knowledge of their abilities beyond housework and mothering, and interests beyond the confines of their homes. Messages in media, particularly the women's magazines to which women looked for advice, catered to the notion that the domestic world was the only one that mattered. Friedan explains the ways in which society had equated domesticity with femininity, forcing women into roles they believed they had chosen, but had not.

Housework, a simple fact of daily life, had become a calling for white, middle-class women in postwar America, but an

unfulfilling one, particularly for women who had obtained college educations. Though these women had obeyed convention—whether by leaving their jobs at munitions factories after the war, or by forfeiting their educations in favor of husbands—housework had left them with the conflicting sense of having both too much to do and nothing at all to do. In her research, Friedan discovered that full-time housewives took more time to complete housework than career women, and they spent less time on leisure. Whereas the career woman found time to read in the evenings, the average housewife found this impossible due to the feeling of having too many tasks to perform around the house. The preoccupation with housework seemed to take up more time and energy than the labor itself. According to Friedan, housewives frequently expended more energy on housework than necessary just to make up for their boredom. The problem was not a lack of things to do—for, housework technically never ends—but, a lack of anything substantive to do. What's worse, housewives' identification through others—their husbands and children—made them feel guilty about time that they dedicated to themselves, often leading them to spend more time than necessary on a single chore.

According to an article in *McCall's* magazine from April 1957 titled "Is Boredom Bad for You," the "cure" for domestic boredom was to find "honest enjoyment in some part of the job such as cooking or an incentive such as a party." The author also mentions "male praise" as a "good [antidote] for domestic boredom." Friedan cites the article as an example of how the feminine mystique sought to convince housewives to regard their housework as a "job"—equal to other jobs in its occasional drudgery, but with the external benefits of parties and male praise. Meanwhile, the article never addresses the internal problem of chronic dissatisfaction which led to problems such as alcoholism, overeating, and the abuse of tranquilizers.

The feminine mystique had coaxed women into believing that their activities within their homes comprised the only world they needed to know. A properly feminine woman was solely dedicated to domesticity. During the Eisenhower era, women's magazines, which usually had male editors, promoted images of women who had no other purpose in the world than "snaring a husband" and committing to life as a housewife. The "mystique" led to the creation of a "happy housewife heroine" who contrasted with the spirited career women of the 1930s and 1940s. The magazines published stories about women who were younger, both "in looks" and in their "childlike kind of dependence." When they envisioned the future, it was exclusively with family-planning in mind. When they talked about money, it was never anything "boring, like taxes or reciprocal trade agreements, or foreign aid programs"—though they knew about these things; rather, it was how to increase their allowances. Stories such as "The Sandwich Maker" showed a woman using her creativity and entrepreneurial spirit to start a lunch service. However, the story concludes with the woman abandoning her successful but overwhelming enterprise in relief after finding out that she is pregnant. The "happy housewife" in these stories usually found work to be "too much" and was relieved to revert back to her "job" as a mother, while letting her husband be the "boss" of money.

The "mystique" had forced women to choose between being career women and wives and mothers, whereas the New Woman of the 1920s and 1930s had had both a "passionate determination to live her own life"—and to love a man. By the 1950s, taking an individual interest in one's own pursuits and learning about the world beyond the home had come to be seen as "unfeminine." Women's magazines avoided publishing articles about the issues of the day—such as desegregation or the Cold War—due to the belief that their readership lacked an interest. The goal of the magazines seemed to be to keep women's perspectives narrow—to confine their minds to the home as securely as their bodies had been. A woman who was interested in the issues of the day might be tempted to participate in them, thereby disrupting the static mode of life that made her "feminine."

Friedan illustrates the domestic sphere as a feminine-centered world that has little to do with women or their realities. Rather, it is a world based on an idea of how women ought to live. The solution for boredom in domesticity, according to Friedan, did not lie in digging deeper into one aspect of housework to find enjoyment, but rather in ceasing to valorize housework at all. Furthermore, she insisted on doing away with the image of the housewife—a woman defined by her relationship to housework—in favor of an image of womanhood based on women's actual capabilities and desire to contribute to the world in meaningful ways, a desire which necessitates that women move beyond the limits of the home.

NATURE VS. NURTURE

The social sciences, which had developed significantly since Friedan started researching and writing *The Feminine Mystique*, had not undermined the social prejudices that hindered women's development but had instead validated them. Functionalism (a way of thinking about individuals and institutions that stressed the "function" they serve to their society) asserted that men and women must complement each other within their traditional roles so as not to duplicate functions. In other words, social scientists had encouraged the belief that women were naturally more nurturing and were therefore more interested than men in homemaking and child-rearing. Friedan argues that social scientists and educators had abandoned their responsibility to show that gender roles are constructed, instead validating the feminine mystique which presented such roles as natural.

Friedan cites noted anthropologist Margaret Mead as a leading example of a social scientist promoting functionalism through

her work. Mead's observations of "three primitive societies" had "revealed an infinite variety of sexual patterns and the enormous plasticity of human nature." However, those observations did not impact her view of womanhood, which she defined according to "sexual biological function." Mead had endorsed the feminine mystique in her work, which "glorified the sexual function" and asserted independence as a masculine thing that had to be unlearned by women. In the 1960s, Mead reversed her position and voiced concern over what she described as the retreat of women— "each to her separate cave"—into domesticity. While Friedan gives Mead some credit for her ideas about motherhood, such as Mead's encouragement of breast-feeding, she blames Mead for contributing to the feminine mystique by persuading women to believe that their biology made them predestined for a domestic role. If women had retreated to their respective "caves," it was partly due to researchers, such as Mead, giving an intellectual basis to social myth.

The colleges that middle-class women attended also encouraged them to embrace their domestic roles as their primary functions. While some professors were disappointed by the disinterest their female students showed toward their studies (a disinterest born out of a fear of being regarded as "peculiar" or "unfeminine"), others encouraged the young women's lack of critical thinking. Sex-directed educators—that is, instructors and administrators who encouraged women to embrace training in "feminine" subjects, such as home economics—reinforced the assumption that a woman's main desire was to have children and that college should be a training ground for her primary duties as a wife and mother. On the other hand, educators did not offer this "family-minded training" to boys because it would have taken time away from their education. Many young college women had used the prospect of marriage and children to avoid the hard work of intellectual development. A minority of those who had taken their educations seriously reported, in a survey, feeling that their educations had made it more difficult for them to be content in their roles as housewives. Conformity to such a prescribed role—which emphasized "feminine" virtues such as passivity and intuition over independence and critical thinking—was easier than doing the work of forging one's own identity and life goals.

Friedan shows how academia, like advertising firms, was complicit in convincing women that they were meant to be housewives. While ad firms pitched the message, institutions of higher learning very often validated that message and indoctrinated women with it. If this were not enough, respected scholars reaffirmed the feminine mystique in their work, elevating it the status of research-based fact. While advertisers had no responsibility to pursue truth, scholars and educators did. The inability of social scientists and educators to distinguish the fiction of the feminine mystique from facts about human behavior merely revealed how deeply ingrained the mystique had become in people's minds and attitudes toward women. Friedan shows how unclear the distinction had become between "natural" behavior and that which was learned and systematically reinforced.

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND SEXISM

Psychoanalysis became very popular after World War II, particularly among Americans who became fixated on Freud's notion of penis envy (the idea that a woman learns in girlhood that she lacks a penis and, to make up for her inability to get one, forms "masculine" ambitions, such as pursuing a career). Friedan argues that the problems regarding interpretations of Freud in the United States were two-fold. First, Americans had accepted Freud's sexist, Victorian view of women, which characterized the most desirable women as child-like, nurturing, and solely dedicated to their roles as wives and mothers. Second, newer theories supposedly based on Freud's ideas had turned popular notions about gender into supposedly scientifically-proven facts. Friedan illustrates how Freudian psychoanalysis, a supposedly objective field of study about human behavior that formed the basis of modern psychology, was largely influenced by sexist bias.

Using Freud's letters to his future wife, Martha, as evidence, Friedan creates a portrait of Freud as a man who saw women as "childlike dolls." These women existed only in relation to men's love and to serve men's needs. The women whom Freud viewed as nurturing and sexually appealing were infantile. On the other hand, he took only a platonic interest in women who had serious intellectual lives of their own. Freud's view of women validated the feminine mystique by positing that career women were "unnatural" and envious of men.

Freud was particularly averse to philosopher John Stuart Mill's views on "the woman question" because he believed that women's increased activity outside of the home would turn them into men's "competitors." Equality between the sexes, he thought, would reduce a woman's "tender attributes," which sought to gratify a man's every wish, just as his mother had gratified his as a boy, at the expense of his musically-gifted and ambitious sisters. Freud liked intellectual and ambitious women, "but they had no erotic attraction for him." These were, for him, women of a "masculine cast" for whom "normal femininity" could only be achieved through the renunciation of "active goals of her own" in favor of those which pertained to her husband or her son.

Freud posited that it was through the birth of a son that a woman could satisfy her supposed desire for a penis—an envy which Freud believed tended to be projected onto her husband until she gave birth to the desired son. Of course, Freud's view of women was impacted by the era in which he lived. His position, therefore, was that women were "biologically inferior

to men."

For Freud, his understanding of middle-class femininity was based on penis envy—his idea that when a little girl learns of the existence and significance of the penis and finds that she does not herself have one, she believes that she is at a great disadvantage, for which she must compensate. Thus, if a woman in analysis expressed a desire to pursue "an intellectual career," it was merely a sublimation of her true desire for a penis.

Freudian theory thus helped to validate the feminine mystique by convincing women that their active pursuits and ambitions were merely manifestations of penis envy. Thus, "the most advanced thinkers of [Friedan's] time" elevated Victorian standards over the needs of the postwar era and encouraged women to embrace domesticity fully. Conversely, men were inclined to support women's retreat into the home, since having female "competitors" triggered what Freud classified as "the castration complex," or the fear of losing the penis to a woman with "penis envy."

Like anthropology, psychoanalysis supported the notion that biology determined a woman's social role, but Freud went further when he theorized that it was not merely what women's bodies possessed which determined their roles, but also what they lacked. A woman who understood and accepted her deficiency devoted herself to her family. A woman who could not accept what was "missing" tried to make herself "masculine" through the pursuit of active, non-domestic goals. These pseudo-scientific ideas only served to reinforce the feminine mystique, portraying women who did not conform to prescribed notions of femininity as somehow perverse.

CONSUMERISM AND THE POWER OF ADVERTISING

The problem that has no name pervades *The Feminine Mystique*. It has no single cause, but manifests as a chronic sense of dissatisfaction with the things that housewives had been taught to want: a house in the suburbs, a husband with a career, children, and the purchasing power to buy as many appliances as they want. Advertising firms, eager to exploit the purchasing power of housewives, peddled the idea that women could feel the sense of achievement they otherwise lacked through purchasing products. The housewife's surplus of energy and dearth of useful outlets could be channeled into consumerism and exploited by department stores. Friedan refrains from forwarding the notion that ad men conspired to confine women in their role as housewives. On the contrary, she shows how advertisers exploited the housewives' desires to sell them the products on which they depended to maintain sparkling floors and spotless laundry. Advertisers helped convinced these women that achieving perfection in their chores would lead them to happiness. Knowing that women were the primary spenders in their families led advertisers to perpetuate the image of the housewife as the standard-bearer of femininity—an image that was supposed to make women feel secure in their "function" as housewives, but which only made them feel more uncertain about the causes of their suffering.

The "sexual sell," as Friedan calls it, was a business strategy whose aim was to "[delude] women about their real needs" in the interest of selling them products that addressed the women's perceived need to be perfect housewives. The tactic manipulated women's insecurities and distorted notions of happiness. Friedan gives the example of a baking mix which allows housewives to feel the achievement of baking without taking time away from other household tasks. The advertisers of the baking mix could increase their sales if they exploited the housewife's guilt about never doing enough, or her creative frustration, by encouraging her to take advantage of every imaginable use of the product. The creative energy that would have gone into a career is instead channeled into domestic work. Thus, the sellers of the baking mix use the housewife's desire for achievement to further pin her in a domestic role, and to encourage her to buy more products that promise to help her find a sense of achievement and fulfillment within that role. Another key part of the "sexual sell" was to create desire for products in teenage girls so that, by the time they married, they would be loyal to brands they saw as the source of their fulfillment. Friedan offers the anecdote of a sterling silver manufacturer who described the importance of convincing girls to buy sets of sterling, so that other girls will be motivated to buy their own sterling. Advertisers courted the teenage market through "schools, churches, sororities, social clubs" and "home-economics teachers." While the "sexual sell" plays on housewives' sense of inadequacy and their desires to excel in their prescribed role, it plays on teenagers' desires to secure the approval of their peers, which includes having the same products as their peers.

While housewives and teenage girls were eager to buy products that demonstrated what good homemakers they would be, they were less keen on buying products for their own enjoyment. The new femininity encouraged "togetherness" and "family-orientation," not the message of "stand-out-from-the-crowd, self-centeredness" that sold products to previous generations. Any product marketed to a housewife had to be marketed as an item whose purchase somehow benefited the entire family, even if she was the sole user. This tactic played on the housewife's guilt over being self-indulgent. The new "sexual sell" was beneficial to the sale of products that had declined in popularity due to their negative associations. One example is the fur coat which had come to be associated with a seemingly useless and "kept woman." The "sexual sell" used the image of a mother in a fur coat as an example of femininity that a girl would want to emulate, transforming the coat's association

with self-indulgence into its opposite—maternal love. Advertisers not only appealed to the housewife's need for a sense of togetherness with her family, but also her shared bond with other housewives who sought out the same products in department stores. A pattern manufacturer was advised to create designs with "fashion conformity" to appeal to the "fashion-insecure woman" who does not want "to be dressed too differently." For the manufacturer, the way to sell more patterns was to build conformity—to appeal to the housewife's sense of isolation by offering her a product that made her feel like she was a part of the world.

Advertising, according to Friedan, is the invisible hand working to coax women into "[buying] more things for the house." The appeal of consumerism as a path to self-fulfillment partly explains "the puzzle of women's retreat to home." Despite new opportunities available to women in the Eisenhower era, Friedan argues that so few had any wish to be anything other than wives and mothers precisely because advertisers had been so successful in selling these women an image of themselves that they were keen to buy. This image conformed to the accepted orthodoxy of the age: that happiness for women was only to be found in and through domestic work and reproduction.

SEX AND MARRIAGE

In the absence of valuable work or a sense of personal achievement, women often turned to sex to feel "alive" again. Friedan strongly objected to the notion that women could find a sense of identity through sex, believing it to be foolhardy. Many women reported gaining little pleasure from being with their husbands, while others sought sex outside of their marriages. As more and more women realized that having a marriage and a family did not guarantee happiness, men too realized that having a wife at home at all times did not always make their lives easier. In this way, Friedan shows that the feminine mystique had created a model of marriage that left both men and women unhappy.

For women who had pursued marriage instead of an education, sexual fulfilment (which Friedan defines largely by the ability to orgasm) and marital bliss were more elusive than they were for women who had attended graduate school. Female professionals reported more sexual and marital satisfaction than their peers who had accomplished less academically and professionally. This finding revealed that personal satisfaction correlated with the ability to find satisfaction in sexual union. Women who had achieved less before marriage often pursued a feeling of completeness through extramarital affairs. The woman who had embraced the feminine mystique at the expense of all else had a view of love that was antithetical to any real type of individuality. This woman accepted the culture's message that love required her to forfeit her distinct sense of self. On the other hand, the woman who had known independence before marriage was more often able to find a love based on desire, not need, and used it to strengthen her individuality. Friedan argues that the "emancipated" woman's independence and strong sense of identity not only increased her ability to reach orgasm, but also made her better suited to marriage, as she did not marry to achieve selfhood, but rather to share the self she had already constructed with someone who loved her.

Less "emancipated" women reported being very interested in sex, but they did not experience it with the same degree of pleasure as more accomplished married women. When Friedan asked her subjects what they did when they were not busy with domestic concerns, they chose to talk about sex. They were eager to talk about the topic and some reported having affairs. However, Friedan noted how "unsexual" they sounded when introducing the subject. They were not really interested in sex, but instead wanted to recover a "feeling" they had lost—a "feeling of identity," or the feeling of happiness they experienced when they married—through performing the act.

While women had affairs to achieve a sense of identity, men often had them to escape from "the devouring wife." Both men and women were looking to escape from the strictures of domesticity, which had resulted in the devolution of the "human relationship." Both, as a result of their mutual discontents, had eliminated the relational aspect from sex. According to the Kinsey report, most American men's sexual outlets were not with their wives. Though their wives were clearly very sexual, and popular culture exploited the stereotype of the American woman's large sexual appetite, many men took little interest in their wives. Instead, they sought office romances, both casual and intense affairs, or a sexual relationship "totally divorced from any human relationship." Others preferred relationships with "Lolita" types—girlish women who would not be aggressive like their grown wives and would not seek to live vicariously through them. Girlish women such as these would make no demands on men at all. Rather, they would assume the states of passivity and compliance that men had originally hoped to find and foster in their housewives. The feminine mystique had made it more difficult to view wives as lovers. Instead, they became, for their husbands, a source of frustration. The suburban housewife's status-seeking, which resulted in always wanting to buy more products, and her dominance as the manager of the household, bred hostility between her and her husband. Her role, even as expressed toward her husband, was maternal. This resulted in the juxtaposition of "the devouring wife" with "the devouring mother"—a stock character in Tennessee Williams's plays—in the popular imagination. Both types were aggressive in their femininity and dominated their husbands through a strong assertion of their domestic roles.

The feminine mystique had contributed to turning marriage into a state of disunion and alienation between husbands and wives. Women pursued feminine ideals to obtain a husband

and, in that pursuit, garnered men's hostile resentment, which men then directed toward other women. Men wanted wives whose sole pursuits were domestic, then recoiled when those seemingly passive women became aggressive taskmasters. Thus, sex became a means for both men and women to escape the "mystique."

WORK

Friedan offers work outside the home as the true antidote to the problem that has no name. She does not advocate for just any kind of work (since purposeless work would only reinforce a woman's sense of purposelessness), but for work that allows a woman to display her talents and to build relationships with people outside of the home. The feminine mystique had convinced women that their sole purpose was the performance of housework—menial tasks that took women out of the world. Friedan argues that work outside of the home was critical in helping women feel less isolated, and in helping them to construct an adult identity.

Notions of proper femininity dictated that if a woman performed any tasks outside of the home, they should be duties related to their children, such as becoming a member of the Parent-Teacher Association. However, for many women, domestic and community-related duties did not suffice in satisfying their creative energy or their urges to make a difference in the world. Very often, women directed their need for work-related achievement into their children, with detrimental results. Popular psychology had promoted the "symbiosis" concept, which "strongly implied that the constant loving care of the mother was absolutely necessary for the child's growth." The merging of mother and child had, instead, stunted both, creating mothers who lived vicariously through their children and children who could not form their own identities due to the constant interference of the mother. The children of such overly attentive mothers developed passivity, allowing their mothers to manage their responsibilities. Friedan uses the example of a "world famous" school system in affluent Westchester County, New York whose stellar graduates had gone on to be poor students in college. An investigation revealed that their mothers had been doing their homework, even writing their term papers, throughout high school. The mother's need for achievement supplanted the child's own, creating a generation of youth that eschewed responsibility in favor of "kicks," or temporary enjoyment, which sometimes led them to delinquency.

Friedan uses these reports not only to undermine ideas in pop psychology which reinforced the feminine mystique, but also to illustrate the ways in which an absence of fulfilling work for women created unhappiness all around, with women resenting their husbands for not helping with housework and smothering their children's potential for self-actualization. Friedan reasoned that, if women had real opportunities for self-actualization—that is, if they felt engaged in matters beyond themselves and their immediate relations—they and their families would report more satisfaction. According to one "massive and famous" sociological study that Friedan cites, happiness and sexual satisfaction in marriage corresponded with professional achievement. Women in professional careers, including teachers, lawyers, and doctors, reported more personal satisfaction than those who "held skilled office positions," such as being a secretary or file clerk. Happiness corresponded not only to professional achievement, but also to income. In other words, the higher a woman's income, the more likely she was to report satisfaction in her marriage. A skilled office worker was, therefore, less likely to be satisfied than a professional, but far likelier to report marital satisfaction than a woman who had learned a vocation, a woman who performed menial work to supplement family income, or a woman who had never worked.

Though it seems that Friedan supports a capitalist model of achievement—arguing that fulfilment will come through economic productivity and that higher levels of income can contribute to a woman's happiness—she also allows for the possibility that rewarding work does not necessarily have to be a salaried job. Work, in whatever form it took, was a pursuit that helped a woman feel like she was a part of the world and had something valuable to contribute to it, independent of her biological function as a woman.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in blue text throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE CONCENTRATION CAMP

Friedan uses the extreme analogy of likening a housewife to a prisoner in a concentration camp to demonstrate the way in which women "adjust" to their oppressed condition as housewives—a condition which destroys their sense of identity—in the same way in which prisoners adjusted to life in Nazi camps. While Friedan acknowledges her risky comparison, agreeing that "the suburban house is not a concentration camp" and that "American housewives [are not] on their way to the gas chamber," she insists that housewifery and suburban comforts are still a kind of "trap" which women must "escape," just as the prisoner must escape the camp, to "recapture" their freedom and lost sense of self.

THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE

The "feminine mystique" was the idea that women were most content as wives, mothers, and

homemakers. The "mystique," as Friedan sometimes calls it, was a ploy to convince women—many of whom had worked in factories and in other jobs during World War II—to return to traditional domestic roles. Friedan posits that the return to the home may have resulted from a desire to address the needs of returning veterans who were too old to return home to their families, but still in need of the nurturing of a mother. Advertisers, seeking to capitalize on the booming postwar economy and the convenience of home appliances, promoted the "mystique" through ads that promised women fulfillment through cleaner homes. The "feminine mystique" had lured women with its promise of suburban middle-class comfort and a feeling of purpose without requiring the woman to do the work of maturing. The "mystique" promised to make things uncomplicated for women, reinforcing the idea that a feminine woman was a domestically-oriented one. In truth, however, this role did not leave women satisfied. Thus, the "mystique" comes to stand in for the empty promise peddled by American society, that striving to embody the popular ideal of femininity would lead women to happiness.

THE PROBLEM THAT HAS NO NAME

Friedan uses this phrase to describe a chronic sense of dissatisfaction among white, middle-class women in the postwar era. Toward the end of the book, she explicitly defines "the problem" as "simply the fact that American women are kept from growing to their full human capacities." She first observed "the problem" when conducting a survey among fellow Smith College alumnae and noticed it again when interviewing other women from around the country. Friedan also describes it as a "strange stirring" and a "yearning" that took root among women in the middle of the twentieth century. It was a feeling that they often contemplated quietly or when alone, but occasionally shared with other women who also reported feeling unfulfilled by housework and the work of child-rearing. Reports of discontented homemakers disrupted the popular image of the happy housewife promoted by advertisers—pretty women who "beamed over their foaming dishpans." Many actual housewives did not fit this image, but instead described a sense of emptiness. Not knowing the source of "the problem," they cast blame on their husbands or children. Others diverted their attention away from their dissatisfaction and emptiness by redecorating, having affairs, moving to another neighborhood, or having another child. The "problem that has no name" stands in for the multifarious feelings of dissatisfaction that characterize the American housewife's daily life, which she cannot seem to attribute to any one root cause—precisely because the sources of her unhappiness are so deeply engrained in her materialist, patriarchal culture.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the W.W. Norton edition of *The Feminine Mystique* published in 1963.

Chapter 1 Quotes

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—"Is this all?"

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan opens the first chapter with a meditation on the lives of women who settled into domestic routines with the belief that they were fulfilling their feminine purpose. Friedan never specifically defines "the problem," a thing that could not be defined due in part to the unwillingness of many women to discuss it. It existed, instead, as a feeling of un-fulfillment, and one that varied in its expression. Women distracted themselves from the feeling by performing a series of chores and, in obedience to the feminine mystique, by forgetting their own needs to cater to other people. However, when left alone with their own thoughts, they could not help but wonder if there was something missing from their lives.

Friedan describes "the problem" within the context of the everyday objects that are associated with the comforts of American life: beds, groceries, and fabrics. She uses them to demonstrate that, contrary to messages from advertisers, those objects bring no real comfort. She also mentions some institutions—the Cub Scouts and Brownies—in which parents place their children. These institutions sometimes also play a role in the conditioning of children, encouraging them to conform to particular gender roles.

It is no longer possible to ignore that voice, to dismiss the desperation of so many American women. This is not what being a woman means, no matter what the experts say. For human suffering there is a reason; perhaps the reason has not been found because the right questions have not been asked or pressed far enough. I do not accept the answer that there is no problem because American women have luxuries that women in other times and lands never dreamed of; part of the strange newness of the problem is that it cannot be understood in terms of the age-old material problems of man: poverty, sickness, hunger, cold.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan refers to "the stirring" within American housewives who, despite messages which told them that they were the envy of women throughout the world due to their economic power as consumers, felt dissatisfied with their comfortable but dull suburban lives. For them, "being a woman" was not about consumerism or the fulfillment of a feminine ideal—an ideal that was often incompatible with their own views of themselves. Friedan dismisses the ways in which so-called experts—psychoanalysts, educators, social scientists, and advertising "manipulators"—attempted to tell women what it means to be a woman.

The feeling of unease in women had "a strange newness" because, in the past, the unhappiness of women *could* be attributed to the grueling nature of manual household labor. With the advent of widely-available and affordable electric appliances, this was no longer the source of the problem for middle-class women. With the abundance of work available to their husbands and the booming economy that persisted from the late-1940s to the 1960s, they could not complain about a lack of money, though they did not usually have their own income. The problem was emotional and had to do with feelings of personal value, which could not be measured by the objects which surrounded women.

Chapter 2 Quotes

The image of woman that emerges from this big, pretty magazine is young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies, and home. The magazine surely does not leave out sex; the only passion, the only pursuit, the only goal a woman is permitted is the pursuit of a man. It is crammed full of food, clothing, cosmetics, furniture, and the physical bodies of young women, but where is the world of thought and ideas, the life of the mind and spirit? In the magazine image, women do no work except housework and work to keep their bodies beautiful and to get and keep a man.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan outlines the typical subject matter of women's magazines in the 1950s. The magazines reinforced the feminine mystique, which encouraged women to identify their sense of femininity with the maintenance of their appearances, the pursuit of husbands, having and raising children, and maintaining a spotless home filled with all the conveniences of modern life.

The image that the magazines promoted was that of a soft, young, materialistic woman who did not engage much with what went on in the world, or even with what happened in her own lives, but accepted things as they occurred. The magazines' insistence that "the happy housewife heroine" be a young woman reinforced the notion that a woman's ability to reproduce defined her. A beautiful and valued woman was, thus, always young, which motivated the readers' obsessions with their appearances. This focus on surfaces—the appearances of youth and happiness—kept women from exploring and understanding who they were. The absence of more serious articles instructed them to believe that their bodies and their homes were the only realms which should have concerned them.

The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity. It says that the great mistake of Western culture, through most of its history, has been the undervaluation of femininity. It says that this femininity is so mysterious and intuitive and close to the creation and origin of life that man-made science may never be able to understand it. But however special and different, it is in no way inferior to the nature of man; it may even in certain respects be superior. The mistake, says the mystique, the root of women's troubles in the past is that women envied men, women tried to be like men, instead of accepting their own nature, which can find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan claims that magazines began to promote the feminine mystique in earnest after 1949. Due to the influences of psychoanalysis and the theory of functionalism in anthropology, women became convinced that their purpose in life was to preside over the domestic sphere, to be the obedient mates of men, and to dedicate themselves completely to serving the needs of their children, particularly their sons.

To convince women that it was best for them to remain at home, the feminine mystique stated that they deserved to be put on pedestals, for their ability to bear children gave them a mystical quality and made them closer to nature than men (who presumably relied more on thought and rationalism to explain the workings of nature), while women *felt* the workings of nature. By trying to "be like men"—that is, develop intellectual interests and have careers—women had denied their own natures and convinced themselves that domestic life was inferior to that of public life. The feminine mystique was rooted in essentialist beliefs about the sexes that declared any deviation from its standards to be abnormal.

Chapter 3 Quotes

The feminine mystique permits, even encourages, women to ignore the question of their identity. The mystique says they can answer the question "Who am I?" by saying "Tom's wife...Mary's mother." But I don't think the mystique would have such power over American women if they did not fear to face this terrifying blank which makes them unable to see themselves after twenty-one. The truth is—and how long it has been true, I'm not sure, but it was true in my generation and it is true of girls growing up today—an American woman no longer has a private image to tell her who she is, or can be, or wants to be.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 71-72

Explanation and Analysis

In exploring what she calls "the crisis in women's identity," Friedan looks at how the feminine mystique taught women to identify themselves in relation to others, primarily their husbands and children. Identifying with others allowed women to avoid the hard work of growing up and forming their own identities. Worse, the culture discouraged individual exploration by insisting that adult women fit themselves into roles as wives and mothers. The possessive form of identification signified that women belonged to their spouses and children. Without that identification, they felt as though they did not really exist. A woman belonged to others, and as such her sense of identity was left to others—psychoanalysts, social scientists, educators, and advertisers, among others—to define.

The expectations of feminine fulfillment that are fed to women by magazines, television, movies, and books that popularize psychological half-truths, and by parents, teachers, and counselors who accept the feminine mystique, operate as a kind of youth serum, keeping most women in the state of sexual larvae, preventing them from achieving the maturity of which they are capable.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan addresses the cultural pressures that have led to "the crisis in women's identity." "Feminine fulfillment" ironically has nothing to do with a woman's sense of personal fulfillment, but with her competence in and dedication to fulfilling others, particularly her husband and children. The assumption is that, by exhibiting such selfless service, she would be happy and satisfied with herself because she was fulfilling traditionally feminine duties, such as childrearing and maintaining a beautiful household.

The messages many women received from both their family and the culture were that they had to be "other-directed." This convinced them to live according to the expectations of others, which prevented them from discovering their own desires and interests. Like children, they waited for cues on how to behave. By doing what the culture and the experts told them to do, they were never able to learn who they were. By believing that their most important function was their sexual function, housewives never learned what else they could do and assumed the child-like characteristic of co-dependency, identifying through their husbands' and children's successes instead of their own, as well as being overly protective of their children, even into adulthood.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Only men had the freedom to love, and enjoy love, and decide for themselves in the eyes of their God the problems of right and wrong. Did women want these freedoms because they wanted to be men? Or did they want them because they were also human?

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker), Lucy Stone

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

The first-wave feminists, or suffragists, had first made the case that rights for women were human rights. Women had no obligation—at least not a greater one than men—to live as if they existed for the sake of others. Friedan emphasizes the verbs "love," "enjoy," and "decide" in the first sentence to illustrate how men's lives were traditionally active, while those of women were passive, and to show that society allowed men subjectivity while it demanded that women turn themselves into objects for others' use. While men were only obligated to answer to God (Friedan's use of the words "their God" also illustrates how religious faith was a personal matter for men), women answered to men, who were the gods or rulers of women. Because freedom had been defined in a masculine context for so long and individuality had only been allowed to men, it was difficult for people to separate freedom from the male image that usually accompanied it. Thus, women were accused of wanting to be men when they merely wanted the same rights without losing their identities as women.

❝ Did women really go home again as a reaction to feminism? The fact is that to women born after 1920, feminism was dead history. It ended as a vital movement in America with the winning of that final right: the vote. In the 1930's and 40's, the sort of woman who fought for woman's rights was still concerned with human rights and freedom—for Negroes, for oppressed workers, for victims of Franco's Spain and Hitler's Germany. But no one was much concerned with rights for women: they had all been won. And yet the man-eating myth prevailed.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan explains how the first-wave feminist movement became irrelevant. It was partly due to a false image of feminists, which persisted well beyond the first wave of feminism, but also due to politically-active women becoming more concerned with other political causes. It did not occur to such a woman to include women's rights in the fight for human rights. Suddenly, everyone else, everywhere else, was more important than she. Politically-active women who had forgotten about feminism in order to dedicate themselves to other causes were not dissimilar from the passive housewives who tended to their families while neglecting their own well-being. The same traditionally feminine belief, fostered by the feminine mystique, prevailed: women were secondary and could only prove their value by being of service to others.

Chapter 5 Quotes

"Normal" femininity is achieved, however, only insofar as the woman finally renounces all active goals of her own, all her own "originality," to identify and fulfill herself through the activities and goals of her husband, or son.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker), Sigmund Freud

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan describes "normal" femininity according to the psychoanalyst Dr. Helene Deutsch's theory that femininity developed out of a combination of factors: a girl's realization that she lacks a penis, the "penis envy" that resulted from this realization, and social expectations that she get married and have children. In keeping with Freud's view that passivity was a woman's natural state, a "normal" woman would give up any independent activity and only take interest in the things that mattered to her spouse or her children, particularly her sons (if she had any). This would mean not having any independent intellectual pursuits and not working, as these activities were indicative of "originality." Any independence or intellectual curiosity that a woman developed in girlhood would be abandoned.

Girls who grew up playing baseball, baby-sitting, mastering geometry—almost independent enough, almost resourceful enough, to meet the problems of the fission-fusion era—were told by the most advanced thinkers of our time to go back and live their lives as if they were Noras, restricted to the doll's house by Victorian prejudice. And their own respect and awe for the authority of science—anthropology, sociology, psychology share that authority now—kept them from questioning the feminine mystique.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker), Sigmund Freud

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan concludes the chapter on "The Sexual Solipsism of Sigmund Freud" by contrasting the freedom that is permitted to girls, presumably before they discover their "lack" of a penis and develop "penis envy," with the restrictions of femininity in womanhood. She uses the example of Nora, the protagonist from Henrik Ibsen's play, "A Doll's House," as an emblem of how women were not permitted to form their own identities but existed as their husbands' adored objects. Friedan finds this even more tragic in her own time than it was in Ibsen's, for the demands of modern era required more brainpower, but the brainpower of women was going to waste. Ironically, it was women's reverence for science (and in some cases, for pseudoscience) that convinced them to abandon their individual pursuits in favor of total identification with their husbands and children.

Chapter 8 Quotes

In the foxholes, the GI's had pinned up pictures of Betty Grable, but the songs they asked to hear were lullabies. And when they got out of the army they were too old to go home to their mothers. The needs of sex and love are undeniably real in men and women, boys and girls, but why at this time did they seem to so many the *only* needs?

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan contemplates women's "mistaken choice" to return home in the context of the United States after World War II. She opens the chapter with an argument on how the shocks of historical events—a World War followed by a depression, followed by another World War—prompted a desire for nurturing and comfort, particularly among young men. The soldiers, just emerging out of boyhood, still needed the constant love and guidance of a mother, but they were officially adults and had seen too much to return to their boyhood homes. Meanwhile, young women were lonely.

The shock and fear created by war fostered a (perhaps unconscious) belief that one could avoid death through procreation. The need to multiply and thus to live forever through succeeding generations was the most important need. To accommodate the need, young women abandoned

individual pursuits and adjusted themselves to domestic life. Suburban postwar families convinced themselves that they could insulate themselves from the world's dangers, which persisted during the Cold War, by consuming products and producing children.

❝ The mystique spelled out a choice—love, home, children, or other goals and purposes in life.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan explains 'the mistaken choice"—the choice to return home and stay there instead of engaging with the world while maintaining a domestic life—as the notion that women could only do one or the other, while men continued to enjoy both worlds. Women's mistake in making the choice was due to thinking that only one option was available. Her mistake was also allowing others to choose for her what she ought to do. Her fear of being alone encouraged her to choose housewifery over other possible goals, or to commit to being a housewife before even giving herself the chance to think about doing other things.

The mystique was definitive in what it offered. "Other goals and purposes in life" were less definitive. Furthermore, there were few examples of what those other purposes could be. The examples that existed—old-maid librarians and schoolteachers—were unappealing. Women who did not wish to marry and who did not have children seemed crazy or otherwise abnormal. Both the vague nature of "other goals" as well as the unappealing existing examples motivated women to pursue a path that was clear to them, for society had already paved that path and their mothers had shown them the way.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ The very nature of family responsibility had to expand to take the place of responsibility to society.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 240

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan is addressing the way in which housewives expanded the amount of time they spent on housework to stave off feelings of boredom and uselessness, as well as the persistent sense of dissatisfaction with life that plagued many of them. The "nature" of family responsibility had been defined by the culture. However, women had to adjust their understanding of what that "nature" was to convince themselves that they were doing something significant with their lives. Furthermore, if they pretended to be overwhelmed with housework, they could not allow themselves time to think about their own feelings or what went on outside of their homes. Thus, their homes had to "expand" to the point of becoming the world—a world broad enough and important enough to require their full engagement. Anything they were involved in outside of the home—the Parent-Teacher Association, for example—was directly related to their families.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ But what happens when a woman bases her whole identity on her sexual role; when sex is necessary to make her "feel alive?" To state it quite simply, she puts impossible demands on her own body, her "femaleness," as well as on her husband and his "maleness." A marriage counselor told me that many of the young suburban wives he dealt with make "such heavy demands on love and marriage, but there is no excitement, no mystery, sometimes almost literally nothing happens."

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 265

Explanation and Analysis

"Sex-seeking," as Friedan calls it, was less about desire than women's needs to stave off boredom and release themselves from the feeling of "sleepwalking" through their lives. This need to feel "alive" encouraged women to seek out stimulation, but because intellectual life and many career paths were virtually closed off to them, many sought

thrills in sex. As Friedan mentions elsewhere, sex was the only passion that women could permissibly pursue due to its connection to their reproductive function.

The experience of sexual excitement in marriage and outside of marriage was, according to Friedan's reports, generally lackluster. Women placed so many demands on themselves and their partners to fulfill idealized roles (e.g., Sleeping Beauty and Prince Charming) that they could never really relax and enjoy one other. The lack of "mystery" resulted, perhaps, from each party knowing what to expect from the other as long as they adhered to their sex roles instead of acting as individuals.

According to Kinsey, the majority of American middle-class males' sexual outlets are not in relations with their wives after the fifteenth year of marriage; at fifty-five, one out of two American men is engaging in extramarital sex. His male sex-seeking—the office romance, the casual or intense affair, even the depersonalized sex-for-sex's sake...is, as often as not, motivated by the need to escape from the devouring wife. Sometimes the man seeks the human relationship that got lost when he became an appendage to his wife's aggressive "home career." Sometimes his aversion to his wife finally makes him seek in sex an object totally divorced from any human relationship. Sometimes, in phantasy more often than in fact, he seeks a girl-child, a Lolita, as sexual object—to escape that grownup woman who is devoting all her aggressive energies, as well as her sexual energies, to living through him.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker), Alfred Kinsey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 273

Explanation and Analysis

Living according to the feminine mystique had not resulted in women forming a sense of "togetherness" with their husbands. Instead, it had resulted in discontent among both parties: men resented that their wives were not the passive child-brides they had expected to marry, and women suffered from an inexplicable problem that they either denied or channeled into other aspects of their existences. For both, sex—whether they were having it with each other or in extramarital affairs—had become a distraction from mutual discontentment.

By middle-age, a woman had lost her ability to reproduce. The feminine mystique had created the perception that she lost her value as a result, which led her husband to seek out younger, more compliant women. The man's relative freedom also gave him more opportunities to explore. The attraction to the "Lolita" (a metaphor inspired by Vladimir Nabokov's novel of the same name about postwar America's sexual obsession with youth) was the desire for the fantasy child-wife. A "Lolita" would not seek out her need for achievement through the man as his wife did, for she would not yet have developed such a need. The "Lolita" was a fantasy of passivity, one to which young wives had tried to conform before realizing that their needs for individual expression were too strong.

Chapter 12 Quotes

There is also a new vacant sleepwalking, playing-a-part quality of youngsters who do not know what they are supposed to do, what the other kids do, but do not seem to feel alive or real in doing it.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 282

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan opens the chapter on "progressive dehumanization" with a focus on how the "symbiosis" concept (an idea that manifested from the belief that women should develop a relationship of co-dependency with their children) was impacting the succeeding generation. Like their mothers, young people were in a state of "unconsciousness." Having learned that role-playing mattered more than being oneself, they awaited cues from peers or from the culture at-large to tell them how to behave and what ought to matter in their lives. Friedan describes this tendency as "new," for, like the feminine mystique, she views it as a development in response to the shocks of two world wars and the Great Depression. A sense of hopelessness had seized young people who, like their parents, were merely going through the motions of life, doing what was expected of them.

And so progressive dehumanization has carried the American mind in the last fifteen years from youth worship to that sick "love affair" with our own children; from preoccupation with the physical details of sex, divorced from a human framework, to a love affair between man and animal.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 304

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan discusses "progressive dehumanization" in the context of a crisis in marriage and intimacy. The premature sexualization, as well as the desire among men that their young wives fulfill a kind of proxy maternal role, prevented them from knowing each other as intimate partners. Their lack of self-knowledge prevented them from offering themselves as individuals; they could only perform their prescribed gender roles. Moreover, the idealization of youth and women's desire to stay young in order to fulfill their reproductive function, had resulted in a collective infantilization among adults.

American men and women were fixated on sex in much the same way that small children only know what their bodies need: only with concern for individual satisfaction and less with personal connection. Distance from the opposite sex caused people to transfer their needs for love onto safer objects, such as animals. The culture of the 1950s had stoked this tendency by creating films, books, and television shows in which people's most important relationships were with animals.

> We have gone on too long blaming or pitying the mothers who devour their children, who sow the seeds of progressive dehumanization, because they have never grown to full humanity themselves. If the mother is at fault, why isn't it time to break the pattern by urging all these Sleeping Beauties to grow up and live their own lives? There will never be enough Prince Charmings, or enough therapists to break that pattern now. It is society's job, and finally that of each woman alone. For it is not the strength of the mothers that is at fault but their weakness, their passive childlike dependency and immaturity that is mistaken for "femininity."

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 304

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan discusses how the culture of the Eisenhower era had not only discouraged women from achieving adult independence, but also blamed them for their co-dependency. She compares adult American women to the main characters in the fairy tales they grew up reading—stories that created the fantasy of being "rescued" by an idealized male suitor. The image of housewives as "Sleeping Beauties" is a metaphor for the ways in which women spent the years of their youth in a state of "unconsciousness," or unawareness about who they were and what their purpose in life ought to be. Friedan rejects the notion of looking to men or to psychoanalysis to "awaken" women from their comatose state. Instead, society had to change by offering women more opportunities to participate equally in every aspect of life, which would have fostered in women an obligation to "wake up" and to grow up.

> The comfortable concentration camp that American women have walked into or have been talked into by others [...] denies women's adult human identity. By adjusting to it, a woman stunts her intelligence to become childlike, turns away from individual identity to become an anonymous biological robot in a docile mass. She becomes less than human, preyed upon by outside pressures, and herself preying upon her husband and children. And the longer she conforms, the less she feels as if she really exists. She looks for her security in things, she hides the fear of losing her human potency by testing her sexual potency, she lives a vicarious life through mass daydreams or through her husband and children. She does not want to be reminded of the outside world; she becomes convinced there is nothing she can do about her own life or the world that would make a difference.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 308

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan's analogy of the suburban home to the Nazi concentration camp is a daring comparison, but one that she makes in the context of asserting that women's rights are human rights. The comforts of the middle-class American home were, in her view, hollow. In fact, they did harm by

allowing women to hide behind their objects and feign happiness and pride in their lives. Some women "walked into" the "camp," or chose to submit to the feminine mystique either because they believed in it or *wanted* to believe in it. Others had to be "talked into" it or convinced that they belonged there.

Like those who were corralled into concentration camps, women had been selected due to a characteristic that made them different from those who had the power to confine them. Also, like those in the actual camps, women adjusted to lives of confinement and, in many instances, forgot about who they were before they were shut into their suburban homes. They, like the prisoners, were only interested in their biological functions—the only proof they had that they still existed. Outside of this, they were apathetic. Women did not want to read magazine articles that discussed topics unrelated to their world, and they avoided women whose lives did not resemble their own, either out of resentment or out of a genuine inability to identify. They believed that their conditions were immutable. All they could do was try to get through the boredom and futility of a single day so that they could make it to the next.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ In our society, love has customarily been defined, at least for women, as a complete merging of egos and a loss of separateness— "togetherness," a giving up of individuality rather than a strengthening of it.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 323

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan explains how "self-actualized" people, or people who understand their personalities and interests, develop stronger senses of self as a result of falling in love. They, after all, do not require the other person to give them a sense of purpose or identity. However, American culture's belief in the feminine mystique discouraged self-actualization in women. Instead, women were to experience the world through their husbands. Men experienced less pressure to conform to the concept of "togetherness," and those who did often later resented it, for their upbringings had included the expectation that they become self-reliant. American concepts of personal liberty and individualism had been taught to men and were developed with men in mind.

❝ A woman today who has no goal, no purpose, no ambition patterning her days into the future, making her stretch and grow beyond that small score of years in which her body can fill its biological function, is committing a kind of suicide.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 336

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan concludes the chapter by illustrating the danger of living according to the feminine mystique, particularly according to its emphasis on the biological function, which placed value on women's sex appeal and reproductive ability. A woman who fears growing old or who believes that she will no longer be of use past menopause will have no purpose to live. Friedan is explicit in saying that this was particularly important for contemporary women ("a woman today") due to the demands of modern life, or those of 1963, when the book was published. A woman who did not create a life for herself beyond her prescribed gender role or reproductive function was resigning herself to purposelessness and excluding herself from participation in society. This relinquishment of citizenship was the "kind of suicide" to which Friedan was referring. However, Friedan also provided examples of instances in which women committed actual suicide due to frustration over their feelings of being trapped and useless.

Epilogue Quotes

❝ Perhaps women who have made it as "exceptional" women don't really identify with other women. For them, there are three classes of people: men, other women, and themselves; their very status as exceptional women depends on keeping other women quiet, and not rocking the boat.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker), Margaret Mead

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 382

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan talks about "exceptional women," or women who achieved success by being exceptions to stereotypes about women, in the context of notable professional women, particularly Margaret Mead. Mead discouraged women from returning to work, suggesting that their children would be neglected. In expressing this concern, Mead wondered who would be present to tend to a child's scratched knees, asserting that it was a woman's function to serve as the "ever-present mother."

Friedan does not believe that Mead is truly concerned about women, but that she is instead concerned with other women posing a threat to her unique status as a female anthropologist, and as one of few women who could offer a female perspective in her field. Mead depended on the subjugation of other women to maintain her status and authority, just as men depended on the subjugation of women to maintain their social privileges.

> "What we need is a political movement, a social movement like that of the blacks."

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 382

Explanation and Analysis

The "we" to whom Friedan is referring arguably includes all women. However, given her focus on white, middle-class women in *The Feminine Mystique*, it is difficult to imagine that she intended for her "we" to be interpreted to include all women. Friedan's goal was to address the way in which women, and particularly women from backgrounds similar to her own—white, middle-class, and educated—had been oppressed by domesticity and strict standards of femininity. Friedan was right, though, to think that the "mystique" had targeted women of her race and class, as advertising directly addressed women who looked like them, and America had upheld white women as the default for femininity. On the other hand, her statement creates distance between the concerns of women and those of black people, ignoring people who are both: black and female.

> It seemed to me that men weren't really the enemy—they were fellow victims, suffering from an outmoded masculine mystique that made them feel unnecessarily inadequate when there were no bears to kill.

Related Characters: Betty Friedan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 386

Explanation and Analysis

Friedan mentions the existence of a "male mystique" in the context of her activism against the Vietnam War. Just as women had children to prove their worth, young men were going to war to prove that they were prepared for the challenges of adulthood. Like women, they had consumed an image of masculinity through film and advertising, but this image did not always conform with who these men felt they actually were.

The male "mystique" had created an association between men and violent, aggressive acts that proved their strength—hence, Friedan's analogy to killing bears. The tools of modern life, like the appliances that women used, had given men greater convenience, but fewer things to do and fewer ways to "prove" their masculinity. Men and women had not adjusted their senses of what it meant to be men and women to the times in which they lived. Friedan includes men in the feminist movement by identifying them as "fellow victims," language which contrasted with that of radical feminists who demanded greater separation from men. Gender-role conformity had imprisoned both men and women in roles to which they were ill-suited, and which had prevented everyone from being true to themselves.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM THAT HAS NO NAME

Suburban housewives in the 1950s and early-1960s each struggled alone with the problem that has no name. It was a feeling of dissatisfaction, of wondering, while she made the beds and packed her children's lunches, if this was all she would ever do with her life.

Society had convinced many white, suburban, married women that they could be sufficiently fulfilled through maintaining their homes and caring for their children. However, many women still wished to fulfill more individual ambitions.

Both the voices of tradition and of "Freudian sophistication" told women that they should "glory" in their femininity by focusing on marriage, rearing children, learning how to buy the best appliances, cooking gourmet meals, ensuring that their husbands lived long lives, and making sure their sons stayed out of trouble.

Women were overwhelmed with messages telling them to conform to the domestic role, which exploited women for corporate interests and for their free domestic labor within the home. Women were responsible for the care of everyone but themselves.

Truly "feminine" women pitied career women and devoted their ambitions to finding husbands instead. By the end of the 1950s, "the average marriage age" had dropped to 20. Some girls were getting married in high school and some young women still in college were having babies, starting families that would have four, five, or six children.

Young women were identifying femininity with their biological function of childbearing. Their own development was seen as a secondary priority to that of raising a child. Making matters worse, women seemed eager to prove their fertility by having as many children as possible.

Many women never left their homes, except to shop, take their children places, or attend an event with their husbands. Some held part-time jobs as sales clerks or secretaries, but usually only to help with household expenses, or to support their husbands or sons who were pursuing higher education.

The desire to fulfill an unattainable domestic ideal had isolated housewives. They left the home only to fulfill the needs of others. Income which they earned did not really belong to them but went toward the household.

The image of the suburban housewife was part of the American Dream. The culture had convinced women that consumerism—the right to choose cars, appliances, and supermarkets—made them equal to their husbands. The housewife's only concern was to have the perfect home. She had little concern for what went on outside of it. On census reports, these women designated "housewife" as their occupation.

The purchase and maintenance of objects became women's jobs, keeping them too busy to concern themselves with anything that went on outside of their homes. Convincing them that they had legitimate occupations kept many of them from seeking work outside of the household.

Women who reported dissatisfaction believed that something must have been wrong with their marriages or with themselves. They did not understand their problem, which had nothing to do with sex, and classified themselves as "neurotic"—others denied that any problem existed at all.

Women explained their dissatisfaction as a flaw or blemish that had to be removed, as though it were a spot of dirt in the house. When that did not work, they convinced themselves that their anxiety had no real cause.

Friedan talked to women all over the country who reported similar feelings of dissatisfaction. The problem that had no name was a feeling of emptiness that women tried to numb by taking tranquilizers, redecorating the house, moving to another house, having an affair, or having another baby.

Women attempted to self-medicate with drugs. When that did not work, they retreated more deeply into their homes, using housework to distract from their feelings. Others sought fulfillment by developing passions for lovers or fixating on their children.

News media that explored the problem attributed it to superficial causes, such as "incompetent appliance repairmen." Most others blamed education which they believed had failed to prepare women for their roles as housewives. Some advocated eliminating four-year education for women altogether, while others suggested preparing for domestic work with high school workshops on household appliances.

Media trivialized the problem, hoping to avoid the notion that gender roles were to blame. Functionalism was so deeply rooted in culture that some people believed that education which did not reinforce women's domestic role was useless. Suggested coursework also supported women's roles as consumers.

The problem that has no name was dismissed by some who argued that housewives had an advantage in not having to go to work. Others said that their condition was simply an aspect of being a woman. Still others thought that these women were more advantaged than previous generations due to their ability to take part in their husbands' lives, such as accompanying them on their business trips.

The perceived "advantage" lay in being dependent on men. Though some women had the benefit of traveling when they accompanied their husbands on business trips, they went with little else to do but appear as accessories to their husbands. They had no purpose of their own.

According to some psychiatrists, unmarried women patients were happier than married ones. However, single, divorced, and widowed women were "frenzied" in "their desperate search for a man." They joined political clubs, learned to play golf, and partook in other activities that they believed usually attracted men, all with the aim of meeting one.

The feminine mystique encouraged women to misrepresent themselves in an effort to find husbands. Unmarried women sought out activities that they believed attracted men to avoid the stigma of being alone.

Friedan does not accept the notion that American women in the 1950s should have been happier because they had more material advantages than their predecessors. On the contrary, buying more things could only make them feel worse. Women with the problem that has no name spent their lives in pursuit of the feminine mystique. The older ones, in their forties and fifties, had other dreams, which they gave up. The young ones in their twenties never had any other dream.

The constant consumption of products could not address women's sense of purposelessness. Advertisers, social scientists, and psychoanalysts contributed to the notion that women were most content in their domestic roles. Women in their twenties, raised on the feminine mystique, never knew anything else, while older women accepted it in order to conform.

Being housewives had made American women's lives frantic. They spent all day doing chores or performing services for their families. They reported feeling "trapped," waiting at home all day for their husbands to come home and hoping that, at night, they would feel "alive" through sex. In addition to seeking fulfillment through their husbands, they also sought it, through her children, whose lives they micromanaged.

Due to an inability to find satisfaction through personal interests, housewives directed their energies outward. A lot of their excess, pent-up energy was exhausted through sex. They were allowed this outlet due to its role in the fulfillment of women's sex-role function: that of procreation.

Doctors in the 1950s reported patients with "housewife's fatigue." These very tired women slept "as much as ten hours a day" and many took tranquilizers regularly.

In their excessive state of boredom, women convinced themselves that they were tired. Some induced sleep to avoid facing the dullness of another day in their purposeless lives.

Having interviewed many women who were listening to their inner voices, Friedan believes that they were realizing a truth that had eluded experts, such as educators and psychiatrists. Friedan notes that her discoveries present challenges to widely-accepted standards in feminine normality, adjustment, fulfillment, and maturity—standards according to which many women are still trying to live. Beginning to understand the problem that has no name is "far more important than anyone recognizes," and "may well be the key to our future as a nation and a culture."

The truth of women's lives could not come from self-appointed experts, but from women themselves—who needed to be trusted with reporting on their own experiences. The experts had validated the feminine mystique and convinced women that an inability to live according to its standards signaled maladjustment and abnormal behavior. This pressure to conform had silenced women and made them ashamed of their problem.

CHAPTER 2: THE HAPPY HOUSEWIFE HEROINE

Many American housewives believed that they suffered alone from dissatisfaction and were relieved to discover that there were women all over the country who reported similar feelings. They took comfort in talking to Friedan instead of continuing to live in silence. Though the popularity of Freudian psychoanalytic theory had led some to believe that the problem was about sex, it was not. Friedan also noted that women had more difficulty describing the problem that has no name than they did talking about sex.

Many American housewives had been convinced that the only appropriate role for them was that of homemaker. They assumed, based on appearances, that other women were content in that role, which only reinforced their sense of being different. In talking to Friedan, they realized that their discontent was common, though still a source of shame.

American women lived their lives according to a popular image that left something out. For Victorian women, that missing element was sex. Friedan looked to women's magazines to find out what that missing element was for American women. Friedan examines "a typical issue" of *McCall's* magazine, the fastest-growing magazine in the Eisenhower era, from July 1960. In it, she finds articles on courtship and marriage, motherhood, dieting tips, sewing patterns, and a guide on how to find a second husband. Friedan contrasts the prevalence of these articles with the current events of the day, including the Cuban Revolution, the Civil Rights Movement, and breakthroughs in visual art and the sciences.

Women's magazines encouraged the isolation of women into domesticity. As the nation's role in the world grew more expansive, the role of women became smaller and narrower. The magazines reduced the concerns of the average woman to staying slim, finding a man, having a child, and learning how to create a comfortable home for her family. The average housewife, it seemed, knew nothing about the world beyond her doorstep.

Friedan reports attending a meeting of magazine editors, most of whom were men. They claimed that housewives were not interested in world affairs, "unless it's related to an immediate need in the home." Their discussion reminded Friedan of the Nazi era slogan, "Children, Kitchen, Church," which decreed that women should only be concerned with domestic life and not with what goes on outside of the home.

Men were making the decisions about what women read, and their ideas of what interested women were informed by their own sexist bias. Friedan notes the irony of American editors—working in the nation that had liberated Europe from the Nazis—reiterating the Nazis' ideal of family, based on constrictive gender roles.

Friedan contrasts contemporary short fiction with short fiction from the 1930s, which told stories of spirited career women. These women were adventurous, independent, determined, and still loved by men. They were less aggressive in their pursuit of men and very engaged with what went on in the world. Men loved them for their spirits and their looks.

The short fiction published in the 1930s offered more complex views of women and, most importantly, portrayed them as individuals who were self-defined as opposed to depending on their relationships with men to gain a sense of their own identity. Moreover, men loved them for their distinct identities.

The New Women of 1930s fiction were almost never housewives. They were also not always young. Those who *were* young tended to be ambitious and defiant of convention. There was usually some conflict between the protagonist's work and her love of a man—a conflict that she usually resolved by keeping her commitment to herself, since the right man would support her goals.

Protagonists of 1930s magazine fiction were the antithesis of the child-brides of post-war fiction. The inclusion of mature characters demonstrated that women could continue to have interesting lives beyond their child-bearing years. The young characters had active lives that did not include looking for husbands.

By 1949, editors began to publish more stories that promoted the feminine mystique. These stories encouraged women to use their talents inside of the home instead of pursuing jobs. Social scientists warned that the pursuit of careers and higher education could lead to the "masculinization" of women.

In keeping with functionalism and Freudian ideas about "normal" women preferring passive roles, magazine editors reinforced domesticity as women's natural state and created images of femininity within their pages that existed only in the domestic sphere.

The feminine mystique, according to Friedan, "says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of her own femininity." It classifies femininity as "mysterious" and "intuitive" and possibly "superior" to the nature of men. The root of women's unhappiness was in trying to deny their natures and be like men. It suggests that women can only find fulfillment "in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love."

Femininity had not only been constructed as something natural (as opposed to socially taught) it was also envisioned as something mystical. By convincing women that they were in some way "superior" to men, those who wanted to uphold the feminine mystique tried to manipulate women into thinking that they were advantaged.

The "happy housewife heroines" had no vision of the future beyond having babies. Any ambition they exhibited was quickly extinguished by their primary "job" as mothers. Friedan uses the example of "The Sandwich Maker," a short story from an April 1959 issue of *Ladies' Home Journal*. to illustrate the point. In the story, a housewife starts a lunch service to earn her own income, becomes overwhelmed by the work, then quits when she learns that she is pregnant. She decides to let her husband be the "boss" who concerns himself with money.

Stories such as this one reinforced the woman's "functional" role. They discouraged her from fulfilling any creative or entrepreneurial talents that she may have had. This story also suggested (rather overtly) that financial power should rest with men. If the household was a corporation, the husband was the "boss" and the wife was his employee—or, as some feminists suggested, his slave, since she was compensated not with money but with food and shelter.

Previous archetypes of women had included the pure, virginal woman on the pedestal and the sinful woman of the flesh. By the postwar era, the new contrast was between the career woman and "the child-bride heroine." The new sin to exorcise was the pursuit of a separate self.

Both the career woman and the highly sexual woman presented a threat due to their focus on their own satisfaction. The virgin and the "child-bride" were defined in terms of men and reinforced the feminine mystique's obsession with youth.

For a time, the concept of "togetherness," initially promoted by *McCall's* magazine suggested that women have no independent self but live for and through their husbands and children. However, some male critics of the idea of "togetherness" resented the idea of becoming a part of the world of women, for men had more important things to do in society.

The concept of "togetherness" was a manifestation of the "symbiosis" concept. However, it told women that their lives were only worthwhile in relation to others. Men, who had been taught to prize masculinity and individuality, felt limited by ideas of "togetherness."

Once, in a moment of editorial boredom, *McCall's* ran an article in 1956 called "The Mother Who Ran Away." To their surprise, the article brought the highest readership of any other printed article. They realized that many of their readers were unhappy, but were, by then, paralyzed by the feminine mystique that magazines like *McCall's* had promoted.

The story offered a fantasy that many women seemed to share. They did not exactly want to abandon their families, whom they loved, but they wanted to "run away" from the limitation on their existences. To escape is to discover freedom, which the mystique denied women.

When women's magazines ran political stories, they were about Mamie Eisenhower's wardrobe or improvements in education and children's recreational spaces. An article about the prospect of nuclear war brought it "down to the feminine level" by reporting on the distress of "a wife whose husband sailed into a contaminated area."

To avoid tempting women to think outside of the domestic sphere, magazine articles related all world events to what went on inside the home. "Feminine" interests were directed outwardly to the needs of children or the desire to look attractive.

The belief among magazine editors was that their readers could only identify with women whose lives were rooted in domestic concerns. Friedan recalls wanting to write an article about an artist. To ensure that the readership could "identify," she focused on the artist's cooking, how she fell in love with her husband, and painting a crib for her baby—rather than the hours the artist spent working on her craft.

Magazines discouraged stories about women with their own interests and careers, both to avoid the resentment of readers who did not have that liberty, and to reinforce the mystique, which discouraged individual, intellectual pursuits. If the artist painted, it was for her baby and for a practical purpose.

The only career woman who was welcome in the magazines was the image of actresses. However, even by the 1950s, her image had changed. Popular actresses from the 1930s and 1940s were spirited, driven, and complex, while those from the 1950s had a child-like sexuality and often played roles as child-like brides and housewives. Even in writing about an actress, the focus was on her role as a housewife. If she were single, divorced, or childless, Friedan recalls that writers focused on how her career had cost her feminine fulfillment.

The feminine mystique encouraged women to play the feminine role. Actresses, too, demonstrated particular feminine roles through their public images and film roles. Because their lives were on public display, they could serve as cautionary tales for women who wished to pursue careers. However, by the mid-century, the most popular actresses exhibited a child-like sexuality and dependency, not spirited individuality.

Friedan recalls meeting the editor of a women's magazine, a woman older than she, who recalled how the stories about spirited career women had been written by women, while men who had returned home from the war wrote the stories about the happy housewife heroine. They had channeled their longing for the comforts of home into these stories.

Both male and female writers constructed female images that they wanted to see. Female writers created female characters who fit their own self-images as ambitious women. Male writers did not identify with their heroines but satisfied a wish or fantasy in creating them.

Some female magazine editors acknowledged the role they played in validating the feminine mystique. One blamed it on psychoanalysis, which had made them "feel embarrassed about being career women" and made them objects of pity among "college guest editors." Some female writers wrote fiction based on their lives as housewives and identified themselves as "just housewives."

Female magazine editors complied with the feminine mystique to avoid feeling too different from mainstream society's expectations of how women should be. Though they pursued careers, they conveyed the idea that it was preferable to be a housewife, for that image coincided with "normal" femininity.

Popular images of white, middle-class American women splintered into three parts. The first was the "masculinized" career woman who makes the same amount of money as her husband and sees a psychiatrist to discuss how her career has emasculated her husband and made him impotent and alcoholic. The second was the discontented suburban housewife who was envious of her husband's career. The third was "the housewife-mother" who rejoiced in her feminine role.

Images of the career woman and the discontented housewife were based on the idea that these women suffered from penis envy. If they could accept their feminine role, they would be content. Envy for a husband's career was supposedly envy for his masculinity—not envy of his freedom and earning power. The career woman had, on the other hand, taken the masculine role.

The new image of women, according to Friedan, was based on "mindlessness" and materialism: "two cars, two TVs, two fireplaces." It was an image that insisted that women were not individuals. They were, "by definition," excluded from forming their own identity and from adding their voices to humanity.

The emphasis on having two of every household item was a gimmick to convince women that, through consumerism, they could retain their individuality. However, they could still only attain an understanding of selfhood in relation to the household.

CHAPTER 3: THE CRISIS IN WOMEN'S IDENTITY

Friedan recalls preparing to graduate from Smith College in 1942 and being unsure of what to do next. She knew that she did not want to return home and live according to her mother's example, which was rooted in traditional domesticity, but she was also unsure of her original ambition of becoming a psychologist.

Friedan's uncertainty is common to anyone on the verge of adulthood, facing the prospect of entering the world alone and doing something productive with one's life. However, the only female image of productivity she had was that of her mother.

Friedan had won a graduate fellowship to study at the University of California-Berkeley but gave it up to satisfy a boy whom she loved. She then married, had children, lived as a suburban housewife, and worked for newspapers with "no particular plan." While talking to Smith seniors in 1959, she noticed similar confusion among them. Many of them knew that they would become housewives and would not use their educations. The only thing the younger Friedan knew and which these young women seemed to know is that they do not want to be like their mothers. However, they had failed to learn lessons from their mother's lives, which had been limited by the feminine mystique.

To avoid "growing up," Friedan, like many women, chose to get married. This was a way to avoid making any choices about what to do with the educations they had earned. When they were in love, the men often made these choices for them. The "mistaken choice," as Friedan calls it, satisfied men's desire for a constant nurturing presence and solved the problem of women's fear about the outside world. In their avoidance of becoming like their mothers, these women had repeated the same steps.

The younger women reported fears of growing up. They did not want to be housewives but had no other role models. In Friedan's youth, the only other women were "old-maid" high school teachers, the librarian, and a doctor who had a haircut like a man's. Though these women taught Friedan to respect her mind, they were alone. They did not have a family life or a part to play in the world.

Young women believed that, to be career women, they either had to make themselves masculine or make themselves content with being alone. They did not know women who had happy domestic lives and good careers. Furthermore, the career women they knew were isolated in their careers.

Friedan reasons that these dual images would not have so much power if young women were not facing a crisis in identity which experts blamed on the poor conditioning of women for their designated roles. Growing up to ride bicycles and play baseball, studying math, going away to college, and living alone in cities had made them think that they could do what men did. They found themselves ill-suited to their roles as housewives as a result.

The upbringing of girls differed significantly from expectation of who they would be when they became women. Girls were encouraged to take part in physical activity and do well in school. That conditioning was incompatible with the expectation that they would become inactive and disinterested in further enrichment outside the realm of domesticity as adults.

"Forty percent" of Friedan's graduating class at Smith had career plans, but quietly envied women who had left college to marry early. Later, those who had abandoned their educations regretted not learning more about who they were before marrying. They suffered most from the problem that has no name.

Women quietly envied each other, not realizing that they were suffering from the same problem: the lack of self-fulfillment. Both groups submitted to the same expectation of marriage, though women who knew less felt more isolated.

The feminine mystique encouraged women to remain "in the state of sexual larvae," never achieving maturity through the growing pains that are encouraged in men as a part of their personal evolution. Women's awareness of their identity crisis was, in Friedan's view, the first step in their maturation, and in their urge to abandon biology as destiny in favor of forming a "full human identity."

The feminine mystique discouraged women from growing up. In realizing that they were not content solely in domestic roles, women took the first step in learning who they were as well as their individual purposes.

CHAPTER 4: THE PASSIONATE JOURNEY

Friedan marks the first-wave feminist movement—the fight for suffrage a century earlier—as women's first collective search for an identity. Feminists had been vilified and still were in Friedan's time. Friedan notes how her contemporaries viewed feminists as "neurotic victims of penis envy" who "denied their very nature as women."

Society maligned women's pursuit of political power by accusing them of being "unnatural" and of secretly wanting to be men. Thus, the desire of women to vote was portrayed as an attempt to usurp a "masculine" power that only rightfully belonged to men.

Women, during the nineteenth-century, often existed as either childlike wives or as the objects of male attention, like dolls. Many women had no subjectivity. They were confined to the home, but they had a human need to grow—a need that was acknowledged in men, whose place was growing in the world in the 19th-century.

The feminine mystique had discouraged women from growing into fully self-actualized human beings. Their co-dependency made them better wives. Society also convinced women that it was better to be adored than to be given full humanity.

The image of the man-hating, sex-starved spinster contrasted with the reality of many feminists who were in loving and passionate marriages. The only image of "a full and free human being" that existed was male. So, if a woman pursued her rights as a human being, was she trying to be a man or asserting her humanity? This was a question explored by Henrik Ibsen in his play, "A Doll's House," in which his protagonist, Nora, insists that her life with her husband, Torvald, has not been worthwhile, though he has been kind to her. She has only been "a doll wife" and their home has merely been a "playroom." She is unfit to raise children because, in many ways, she is still one herself. Her solution is to assert her identity as a human being who must leave "the doll house" and learn who she is.

The popular image of feminists was designed to discourage other women from joining their political cause, out of fear of joining in the supposed unhappiness of lonely, "sex-starved" women. In Ibsen's play, Nora's decision to leave her home—or the idea of home that was constructed for her—is an attempt to find out who she is outside of the role that has been assigned to her. The play's conclusion marks the first moment in which the character makes a decision for her own well-being. Traditionally, only men made such personal decisions, while women were "other-directed."

Historically, women's struggles for freedom have usually coincided with other moments of political upheaval. Thomas Paine, a spokesman for the Revolutionary War, spoke on the conditions of women in 1775. Women who were refused seats at an anti-slavery convention in London organized the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention in 1848.

Struggles for women's rights have always been struggles for human rights, though they are frequently not seen as the same thing. The perpetual oppression of women during revolutionary moments in history indicates the lengths to which societies go to keep women as a second-class.

Feminists faced slander from the press and from clergymen who accused them of "violating the God-given nature of women." When this did not work, they were accused of being adulterous and supporting "free love."

To force them back into their traditional roles, women were accused of being unnatural or immoral. Both views were informed by religious and social ideas that discouraged equality between the sexes.

One New York assemblymen said that it was not enough that the women had "unsexed" themselves, they were also seeking to "unsex" other women and undo laws from the "higher power" which made men "representative of the race" and women partners at his side, joined to him in matrimony. Feminists were, thus "unnatural monsters" who would reverse "God-given" male dominance and make slaves of men.

The assemblyman did not accuse women of wanting to be men, but of becoming something with no sex at all, hence "unnatural monsters." Feminism so threatened the status quo that it created an image of women that upset people's basic understanding of human behavior.

Some feminists did try to emulate men, sometimes cutting their hair in men's fashions. It was part of their rejection of conventional womanhood, which caused some to reject marriage and motherhood. In performing these acts, they were not only trying to become different women, but also "complete human beings."

Women imitated men because masculinity provided the only model for individual expression that they knew. Their exploration of difference led them to break with gender conventions and explore androgyny, or the expression of both masculine and feminine characteristics.

Lucy Stone had the reputation of "a man-eating fury," a label often given to feminists. She saved her own income from teaching to go Oberlin College, but practiced public speaking in the woods because "girls were forbidden to speak in public." Soon, she began lecturing on the abolition of slavery and the rights of women. Though she also believed that marriage, for women, was a state of slavery, she married Henry Blackwell.

Lucy Stone diverged from traditional femininity by being ambitious, self-sufficient, and politically-engaged. Because she lived in a society that would now allow women to speak for themselves, she, like many feminists of the time, found her voice through joining the abolitionist movement.

Most feminists resisted early marriage and did not marry until they had found identity and purpose as abolitionists and crusaders for women's rights. Lucy Stone did not take her husband's name. Some, such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Blackwell, did not marry at all. Despite accusations that they were engaging in "unwomanly" behavior, they continued to speak out for slaves. By doing so, they learned to speak out for themselves.

Involvement in the abolitionist movement taught women how to speak about their own political concerns. It also engaged them with the concept of freedom. To feel freer from social expectations, they made unconventional decisions in their personal lives. Retaining one's own name was a statement of asserting individuality within marriage.

In the South, where women were kept at home and had little to do, as a result of slavery, the feminine mystique remained intact. In the North, women who took part in the Underground Railroad or who worked in other ways to free slaves "were never the same again." Women who moved west as pioneers were "almost equal" to men from the beginning. Wyoming was the first state to grant women the right to vote.

Work, whether it was for a political cause or to settle new territory, gave women a sense of purpose. In the South, there was either no work to do or the wish of not having to do work. However, a woman's right and ability to work demonstrated her equality.

Feminists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton were usually educated women who disliked the "housewife's drudgery." They were not, Friedan insists, "man-eaters." The fight was not *against* men, but *for* women's rights.

Intelligent women, as feminists typically were, tended to be bored by housework, which kept them home and did not challenge them. They did not dislike men, only their limited roles.

Julia Ward Howe studied every field of interest to her, and she wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" in secret "because her husband believed that her life should be devoted to him and their six children." She became involved in the suffragist movement in 1868 when she met Lucy Stone (whom she found to be "sweet," "earnest," and, indeed, "womanly") and realized that she had believed in a false image of Stone.

In her endless curiosity, Howe discovered feminism and realized that the popular image of feminists like Stone was constructed by men like her husband who wanted women to conform to the feminine mystique. Being a feminist did not mean abandoning womanhood. Rather, it meant defining one's own purpose as a woman.

The notion that feminists were "taking the pants off men" occurred to their detractors when feminists began to wear bloomers. The bloomers were still a dress, but they were more comfortable than the heavy "half a dozen skirts and petticoats" that women usually wore. Bloomers made it easier for women to move around and they often wore them to do housework. When feminists started to wear them in public as a symbol of their emancipation, they were ridiculed in newspapers.

The wearing of bloomers was a step toward breaking away from social constructions of femininity. In their desire for greater personal freedom, women also wanted more freedom of physical movement, which their petticoats and skirts did not permit. The wearing of bloomers also indicated that women were less concerned about external perceptions of them.

Susan B. Anthony and other feminists petitioned the New York State Assembly for the right of married women to own property. They gained 6,000 signatures, but they were met with mockery by the representatives who insisted that women had advantages over men, such as the best seat in a carriage. Others saw the measure as yet another attempt to emasculate men.

The assemblymen believed that expressions of chivalry showed that women were prized in society. They expected women to be content with gestures whose purpose was to make them feel special. However, women did not want to be "special." Their desire for property rights demonstrated an interest in being equal.

Sojourner Truth, a former slave, gave her "Ain't I a Woman" speech, which undermined the "image of empty gentility" which contributed to women's oppression. The Lowell mill girls—factory workers who protested their terrible work conditions—also challenged that image.

Women who had been slaves or those who worked in sub-standard conditions were most likely to challenge conventions of femininity due to the ways in which their race or class placed them outside of middle-class feminine ideals.

The battle to emancipate women was stoked in the nineteenth-century by the battle to free the slaves, while, in the twentieth-century, it was stoked by "the battles of social reform," including strikes against the horrid work conditions in factories. During the temperance movement, feminists sometimes used messages, such as "save femininity" and "save the home," to shut down saloons. Brewers who depended on the cheap labor of underpaid women and children lobbied against women's suffrage. Southern congressmen pointed out that the right of women to vote would also include black women.

Suffragists used stereotypes about femininity in their favor to advocate for political causes, such as eliminating the legal sale of liquor. For brewers, their activism threatened profits. Brewers were hostile toward feminists due to the economic threat they presented. Southern politicians worried about the expansion of the black vote, as well as the possibility of white women abandoning traditional notions of femininity, both of which they saw as threatening white male power.

In fifty years, American women "conducted 56 campaigns of referenda to male voters," 480 campaigns for suffrage amendments on ballots, 277 campaigns to get state party conventions to adopt suffrage planks in their platforms, 30 campaigns to get presidential party conventions to adopt planks for suffrage, and "19 campaigns with 19 successive Congresses." By the end, the feminist movement was not merely comprised of a handful of women, but of millions of women with husbands, homes, and children who devoted as much time as they could to the cause.

Feminists had been successful politically and also in debunking the myth that active, politically-engaged women truly wanted to be men. None of those who had husbands and children abandoned those relationships. Instead, their commitments to their families seemed to inspire them to be more engaged with fostering change.

The negative image of feminists was created and promoted by business interests who opposed women's suffrage state-by-state, even going as far as to buy and steal votes.

Feminists who opposed the sale of liquor presented a threat to the status quo through their ability to mobilize around a political cause.

For women born after 1920, the feminist movement was history. In the 1930s and 1940s, women who fought for human rights concerned themselves with workers' rights, rights for black people, and the fight for victims of fascism in Europe.

Activists did not view women's rights as being part of human rights. To be taken seriously as activists, women probably believed that they needed to distance themselves from issues specific to women.

The label of "feminist," like that of "career woman," became a dirty word. The first women to enter professions were insecure in their roles. They did not want to appear "soft or gentle" and they did not want to have children for of fear of becoming trapped as housewives, as their mothers had been. The only images of women that existed for these freer women were that of the "man-hating feminist" and "the gentle wife and mother."

Women who worked or who took an interest in political affairs did not know how to behave as women in their unconventional roles. They struggled with the perceptions of being too feminine or of appearing too tough. The roles that existed for women did not allow for human complexity or a full range of emotional expression.

The reasons for women's "mistaken choice" to return to the home had less to do with the feminist myth and more to do with messages from educators, medical professionals, scholars, and advertisers who convinced women that they were more secure in being "bound," like the feet of a Chinese girl. Freudian theory also contributed to the image of the "man-eating" feminist.

Various elements from the culture had worked together to contribute to the view that women should adhere to the feminine mystique. Some, such as advertisers, were motivated by profit, while others were motivated by bias and possible fears of new competition in the workplace and social sphere.

CHAPTER 5: THE SEXUAL SOLIPSISM OF SIGMUND FREUD

Friedan does not question the "genius of [Sigmund] Freud's discoveries" or his contributions to American culture, but she does question the application of his theories to contemporary women and argues that those theories have contributed to the problem that has no name.

Freud's importance in intellectual and cultural history has turned him into a figure of unquestionable authority. Friedan thinks that Freud's discoveries were important and brilliant, but as subject to bias as anyone else's ideas.

Freud's concept of the superego freed men from their sense of social obligation, but he helped to "create a new superego" which insisted that women conform to "an old image" that denied them an "individual identity."

Freud, like most of society, believed that men needed freedom if they were to develop as self-aware individuals. Conversely, he thought that women should only be aware of their narrow social function.

Freud's concept of penis envy became very popular, not only among psychoanalysts, but also among sociologists, educators, magazine writers, and advertisers, who applied the theory (which Freud had invented to describe "a phenomenon" that he had observed among middle-class Victorian women in Vienna) "as the literal explanation of all that was wrong with American women."

Because Victorian society believed that women should only function in the domestic sphere while men dominated the public sphere, Freud was convinced that an active woman wanted to be a man. Friedan's contemporaries had applied the same notion to justify constraining women as homemakers and obedient consumers.

Despite his brilliance, Freud was a product of his own culture and could not escape from the standards of that culture. He also lacked an understanding of other cultures. Standards of behavior which he believed were natural have been shown "by modern research" to be the result of "specific cultural causes." He and his patients lived in a time of sexual repression, which also partly explains Freud's preoccupation with sex as the underlying cause of all "psychological phenomena."

Freud did not know much, if anything, about life outside of Europe or the West. He had assumed that the standards of his culture, which were prudish about sex and strict about gender roles, were universal, and natural instead of taught. He was unaware, too, about how sexual repression had informed his own obsessions as a thinker.

Freud also had the habit of defining psychological problems in physical terms. This made the problem seem more "real" and "scientific." Though he saw the psychological problems clearly, he made them more concrete by borrowing terms from literature and physiology, such as "penis envy" or the "Oedipus complex." This caused confusion among "lesser thinkers."

Later thinkers who co-opted Freud's views not only failed to make his ideas applicable to their time, they also tended to read his work literally. Contrary to Freud's intent, his language did not help others see the problems as "clearly" as he did, but only created more misunderstanding about women's psyches and motivations.

By the 1940s, social scientists and psychoanalysts had begun to reinterpret Freud's ideas, but not his views on femininity. His views were the results of the culture of Victorian women, which saw women as "childlike dolls," and his Jewish family, in which his father had established authoritarian rule and his mother was "docile." His mother gave excessive attention to his needs, at the expense of his sisters.

Freud's biography gives clues that might help people better understand the origin of his biases, which informed his theories. His own mother had exhibited dependency and sought a feeling of accomplishment through the successes of her son. In pointing this out, Friedan is turning Freud's own theories against him.

Freud believed that women were to be ruled by men and thought that their "sickness" led them to envy men. His letters to his future wife, Martha, mirror the attitude of Torvald to his wife, Nora, in *A Doll's House*. He insisted that he would let her rule the house, but he scolded her for visiting women who were "less than demure" around men. His mixture of "chivalry and condescension" was evident, too, in a letter in which he condemned John Stuart Mill's views on female emancipation.

Freud insisted that his future wife view her purpose within domesticity. He wanted her to avoid the company of women who had more independence or intellectual interests, for this would make her more likely to challenge her role as nurturer, which Freud had come to expect from women due to his own upbringing. Feminists threatened to take away those comforts.

Freud, in his private life, was rather disinterested in sex. Some biographers have described him as "puritanical," which explains his tendency to "[see] sex everywhere."

Freud's own sexual repression led him to think a lot about sex. He also imagined that everyone else thought about it as much as he did and that all their actions were motivated by sex.

Freud expected his wife, Martha, to identify with him completely. Later, he agreed that she should only be the "loved one," meaning that she took on the role of an adored object who existed for his comfort. He did not expect her to have any opinions or ideas of her own. Their marriage was "conventional," but not passionate. Martha was devoted to Freud's needs, but did not expect to "[share] his life as an equal."

Of his own wife, Freud expected the kind of "togetherness" that was encouraged during the 1950s as an aspect of the "symbiosis" concept. Women, he thought, should exist as supports to men or as beloved objects, similar to pets. This view discouraged women from having their own reasons to exist independent of men.

Freud was also interested in women of "a masculine cast," women who were more obviously intelligent and independent than Martha, but he had no erotic interest in these women.

His sexism taught him to think that intellectual attraction, which he constructed as "masculine," could no co-exist with physical attraction.

Freud developed the theory of penis envy from the notion that women observe their lack of a penis in childhood and do not accept the absence "lightly." The girl wants, for a long time, to obtain something like the penis. Her desire for a penis could lead her to pursue "an intellectual career," which is an attempt to fulfill the repressed wish. Conversely, boys who observe a girl's absence of a penis develop "the castration complex," or fear of losing their masculinity.

Intellectual women, like men, had individual pursuits and asserted themselves as individuals. This was unusual in Victorian society, so Freud assumed that women who behaved in this way must have secretly wanted to be men. Meanwhile, men retained their sense of masculinity by seeing themselves as separate and distinct from women.

When the girl's self-love is undermined by her understanding that the boy is "better-equipped," the value of all women, including her mother, reduces in relation to that of men. This can lead to sexual inhibition, or neurosis, or a desire to pursue activity that is more "characteristic of the male," or an acceptance of "normal femininity," which replaces the wish for a penis with the desire for a child.

The girl, when she realizes that the male is "superior," either wishes to be like him or accepts that she can never be him and finds a more "feminine" way to prove her worth, such as having a child. Freud's bias toward males led him to imagine that a girl would view her own body in terms of lack instead of difference.

Freud only saw women in relation to their sexual relationship with men. His theories pay little attention to the development of "the ego, or self." He did not realize that society's denial of education and independence prevented women from growing and attaining their full potential; he could only attribute their "yearning for equality" to "penis envy."

Like many men of his time, Freud had only known women as wives and mothers. These were normal expressions of femininity, so if a woman digressed from this, there had to be something deviant about her, he reasoned.

Freud's popularizers used pseudo-science to emphasize the notion that women could not attain happiness through male avenues of achievement. "Normal femininity" was achieved when a woman renounced all her own active goals to identify herself through the goals and activities of her husband or her son.

Popular science co-opted Freud's theories to reinforce the feminine mystique. The mystique dissuaded women not only from seeking individual expression, but also from identifying with other women. A woman could only be interested in what interested her husband.

Many American women found it impossible to argue with the theories and accepted that their lack of fulfillment must have been due to penis envy. Freudian theory became a new American ideology which "cast suspicion on high aspirations of the mind and spirit," particularly concerning women.

Women did not have the language to challenge what had been framed as scientific fact. Instead, many of them accepted the ideology and trusted it more than their own feelings about their lives, which had little to do with wanting to be men.

America became the new center of the psychoanalytic movement. "Freudian, Jungian, and Adlerian analysts" emigrated from Berlin and Vienna to practice. Other fields, including sociology, education, and anthropology, absorbed pseudo-Freudian ideas.

Other fields conveniently borrowed and applied Freud's biased theories. The popular interest in Freud made it less likely that anyone would question gender bias based on his ideas.

Girls who grew up actively playing sports and studying geometry "were told by the most advanced thinkers" that they should revert to a Victorian model of femininity. The new message was justified by Freud's theories, which "kept them from questioning the feminine mystique."

Women who had been active and studious as children were made to feel that such behavior was unacceptable and unnatural in women. They did not question how the application of Freud's theories reinforced the ways in which society viewed them in terms of their sexual function.

CHAPTER 6: THE FUNCTIONAL FREEZE, THE FEMININE PROTEST, AND MARGARET MEAD

Social scientists' insights did not "[destroy] the old prejudices" that oppressed American women, but instead, validated them. Instead of rooting cultural bias out of Freud's theories, social scientists fit their "anthropological investigations into Freudian rubric." This, along with "functionalism" (i.e., the attempt to make social science more "scientific" by defining institutions in relation to their function in the society), froze women into culturally-defined roles.

Instead of studying social behavior, social scientists accepted gender conventions as natural, engrained, and necessary to the functioning society. They invented the theory of functionalism to justify gender inequality. Their fault was in conforming their studies to fit the conventions instead of working to understand them impartially.

Books, such as *Marriage for Moderns*, promoted the notion of the sexes as complementary. The book insisted that the only proper response to differences between the sexes was 'adjustment." Therefore, the textbook argues that women should leave their careers and apply their skills to the maintenance of the household, which has equal use for their talents, in teaching, interior design, "and a host of other things." Some women could pursue careers, but only after there had been "profound alterations" in the structure of the family.

Contemporary literature offered women marital advice, encouraging them to conform to their roles. Women were convinced that there was value in the feminine mystique due to the notion that they had a place, a role that had been created especially for them. If women wanted to work, they would have to change the structure of the family as they knew it.

Some sociologists, such as Mirra Komarovsky, recognized the infantilization of girls, which made them more co-dependent as adults. She endorsed the continued infantilization of women to make it easier for women to adjust to their "transition from the role of daughter to that of the spouse." Komarovksy claimed that girls are more attached to their parents, but she could not find evidence that there are more problems "with the wife's parents that with the husband's."

Even female social scientists encouraged the "mystique" through their work. Komarovsky, who probably saw herself as "exceptional" in relation to other women and who accepted Freudian theories about female behavior, did not view dependency as the problem, but insisted that a girl's independence could create problems in adulthood.

Functionalists simply described things "as they were" instead of seeking deeper truths. Though they did not always accept Freud's notion that biology was destiny, they did accept the notion that women were whatever society said they were.

Functionalists justified society's biases about gender instead of examining how society determined those roles and why they may have developed in the way that they did.

Friedan identifies Margaret Mead as the "most powerful influence on modern women" due to her influence as a scholar and her support of functionalism. She was a critical figure in the social sciences. Her ideas were taught in medical schools and read in women's magazines.

Margaret Mead's status as both a woman and a social scientist encouraged women who read her work to trust her voice. However, her work served primarily to reinforce gender bias, Friedan argues.

Mead tended to glorify the female role in relation to its biological function. At times, she looked at anthropological theory from Freud's view. In other instances, she provided the functionalist's view, arguing that it was better "to preserve the sexual biological limitations established by a culture." Sometimes, she argued for both the Freudian and functionalist positions and warned that women face a danger in trying to "realize a human potential which their society has defined as masculine."

Mead encouraged women to limit themselves to domesticity and childbearing by convincing them, through her work, that there was no nobler effort. Like other social scientists, she advocated conformity through the sex role. If women did not conform, they risked being regarded as deviant. This was dangerous because so many women were already at risk of social isolation.

After 1931, it became clear that Mead was using Freudian theory in her anthropological explorations of other civilizations. She identified "the superstructure" on which "a civilization depends, with the penis," while "feminine creativity" was defined "in terms of the passive receptivity of the uterus."

Mead associated men with the active, public sphere, and women with the domestic sphere. Because women could "house" life in their wombs, she concluded that they belonged at home.

Mead used primitive civilizations, such as Samoa and Bali, to justify her notion that biology was destiny. She then applied her observations to 20th-century America. Her depiction of these societies demonstrated that they were shaky places held together by "endless taboos and precautions" that everyone obeyed.

Mead did not recognize the ways in which her biases informed studies of both the "primitive civilizations" and her understanding of American life. She also failed to recognize that the demands of American life differed from other societies.

Mead's role as the spokesperson for femininity might have been less important if women had learned from the example of her life instead of her work. She made her way in a "man's world" through using her unique knowledge as a woman. Her mother and grandmother were educated professionals and she encouraged women to choose, "with free intelligence," to have children.

Mead depended on her gender to advance in her career, for she could provide the "woman's perspective." Though she believed that women should make the individual choice to have children, her encouragement of functionalism still made childbearing seem ordained.

Regarding childbirth and child-rearing, Mead encouraged breast-feeding and thought that women should say "yes" to child-bearing as a conscious choice and not as a burden imposed on their flesh. Mead's ideas about childbirth and child-rearing helped inspire a "cult" of procreation. She was quoted out of context by "lesser functionalists" who found confirmation of their own prejudices in her work.

Like Freud, Mead's work was misused by scholars who advocated the feminine mystique. Still, Mead had made that possible through her idealization of femininity. Though she believed that women should choose to have children, the language of her work pressured women to say "yes" to childbearing.

By the 1960s, Mead voiced concern over what she called the "return of the cave woman," or the retreat of women to "narrow domesticity." She either did not acknowledge or was not aware of her own role in persuading women to retreat. Still, she did not lose her habit of ascribing "a sexual specialness to everything a woman does."

Mead's did not want women to define themselves wholly within the context of domesticity, but she wanted women to see their female identities through the lens of their biological function of childbearing, forgetting that some women cannot have children and others do not want to.

CHAPTER 7: THE SEX-DIRECTED EDUCATORS

In the 1950s, educators were shocked to realize that more women than ever before were going to college, but they were not going to prepare themselves for careers. Two out of three young women who entered college dropped out. Those who stayed were only interested in finding a husband—a pursuit which began as early as freshman year.

College became the arena where women competed to find mates and fulfill what they had accepted to be their destiny: to fulfill their sex function by getting married and having children. Their educations were secondary to that pursuit.

Statistics showed that college presidents, scholars, and educators were leaving women's colleges. Some women's colleges had closed down. The president of Sarah Lawrence College, a women's college, talked about making it co-educational. Some said that college "should no longer be wasted on women," and the president of Vassar College, another institution for women, predicted the end of American colleges for women.

Young women's lack of interest in their intellectual development had not been met with concern as much as neglect and acceptance. Educators assumed that women neither wanted nor needed education. They failed to recognize that this assumption was a product of a broader bias in culture that was constantly reinforced with messaging.

Initially, Friedan thought that the reports were exaggerations or merely the result of the deterioration of some institutions. She noticed the problem during a visit back to Smith College. One recent graduate told her that, in spite of the expectation that they go to college, a girl who was serious about her studies would be regarded as "peculiar, unfeminine." They did not talk about serious ideas as Friedan's generation had, but instead talked about their dates.

Friedan did not realize how much things had changed since the last generation of women graduated from college. Freud's view that intellectual women were "unnatural" had taken hold and formed young women's behaviors and attitudes toward higher education. Thus, many young women had chosen to work, instead, on making themselves more attractive to men.

The female students regarded college as something to get out of the way with haste so that their "real" lives as housewives could begin. They had learned that if they wanted to have a normal, "adjusted" life they should devote themselves to getting married and having children and should not become "seriously interested" in anything else. Some had learned this lesson at home, others from their peers. However, the message was also communicated to them by professors.

Young female students did not see college as the place where they could learn more about themselves and the world. They saw it as the place which kept them from joining the only world they thought mattered—the household. They did not see the purpose of learning who they were in college, for they had been told who they were: future wives and mothers.

Under the influence of the feminine mystique, educators and administrators had discouraged critical thinking in young women. They worried, based on the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Margaret Mead, that a proper education would only doom women to frustration when they inevitably became housewives.

Supported by popular scholarship, some educators accepted the biased notions that women's social function as wives and mothers made a conventional education unnecessary and even potentially harmful.

The sex-directed educator had embraced the views of Freud and Mead, which validated the feminine mystique and encouraged "adjustment within the world of home and children." Some really believed in the "mystique" as social scientists had "handed it to them." Others did not find confirmation of their own prejudices within the theories, but had no reason not to accept them.

Educators played a key role in reinforcing gender bias. Even those who had not "bought in" to the feminine mystique conformed to it, perhaps thinking that women preferred domesticity over intellectual pursuits or because they were less concerned with women's intellectual development.

Those few women who were college educators or presidents either conformed to the feminine mystique, or their authority was questioned. They did not speak on their experiences as women. They did not usually become the presidents of women's colleges; that role usually went to an older man. Sometimes they became the heads of departments at universities where the graduate students were usually male.

Female educators conformed to the mystique to maintain their own positions, which they easily risked losing to a man. They tried to distance themselves from their identities as women to survive in a world that had been constructed for the intellectual development of men.

The female scholar was suspect because she did not work solely to support her household. Sometimes, in her self-defense, she wore very feminine clothing, such as frilly blouses. Friedan observed this habit among female psychoanalysts.

Female scholars overcompensated with feminine clothing, not wanting to be mistaken for deviant, "masculine" women.

The sex-directed educator accepted responsibility for education being the cause of the housewife's frustration. They encouraged a "feminized higher education" to counteract the "masculine" forces in the culture, such as "egotistic individualism" and "quantitative thinking."

This more "feminine" education would encourage women to define themselves in relation to others. It was meant to counteract messages from the postwar era which increasingly espoused the pursuit of science and individual expression.

"Feminized higher education" might include disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology to help women explore "the quiet and unspectacular forces of society and of the mind," but it would also include the "minor arts"—never fine art, which was deemed "masculine"—such as, ceramics or textiles, which required more work from the hand than from the brain. The minor arts also appealed to a woman's love of beauty, which they connected with "the processes of living."

The focus on "minor arts" were a way to convince women that they were being creative without distancing them from domesticity. Ceramics and textiles were items that had everyday use in the home. Fine art was "masculine" because it encouraged critical thinking and engagement with the world and currents in culture.

The sex-directed educator believed that a young woman should begin studying home economics in high school and continue in college, "with greater intensity and imagination." Young men could receive this education, too, but it was not to interfere with "their valuable college time."

Educators who accepted or advocated the feminine mystique believed that women should receive educations that were compatible with their sex roles.

American educators who investigated "the waste of our national resources of creative intelligence" found that too many high school students were taking "easy how-to courses" and that most of those who should have been studying math, science, and foreign languages were girls. They had the intelligence to do the work, but they viewed such subjects as "unfeminine."

Young women became convinced, through messages from the dominant culture, that being intellectual made them unfeminine and would likely diminish their chances of finding a mate. Though they were smart enough to challenge themselves, they did not want to appear *to be.*

The influence of sex-directed education was most pronounced in high schools where women were discouraged from pursuing a professional field of study. If they were accepted to universities to study professional fields, such as architecture, guidance counselors continued to discourage them by saying that they would not find work. Young women were, instead, encouraged to go to junior college where the work was easier and they could learn all they needed to know in preparation for marriage.

Educators and administrators dissuaded young women from being ambitious. College was a place to obtain a husband, not to learn a profession. The isolation of women from professions was due not only to bias in the fields they wished to enter, but also the bias that existed at learning institutions which assumed that gender conformity mattered more to women than having a career.

Women were dropping out of college at a faster rate than men to get married. The average age of first marriage had dropped to the youngest in American history. Meanwhile, "with the advent of science and education," the average age of first marriage was rising in Asia and Africa. Also, the annual rate of population increase in the United States was among the highest in the world.

Though the United States had become the world's most powerful and advanced nation after World War II, women were steadily becoming less powerful, educated, and self-actualized than women in other developed countries.

Education, according to Friedan, is necessary for personal growth. For the girl, her evasion of growth in college was due to having an "exclusively sexual" view of identity. College, for her, was simply the place where she could fulfill her sex role.

Girls viewed their worth not according to who they were but according to their ability to attract a man and hold on to him long enough for them to marry so that she could then have children.

Educators expected boys to achieve "personal autonomy and identity" through their goals. Even if those goals were not realistic in the beginning, the expectation was that they would change in college. Educators did not expect to see that development in girls.

Educators expected evolution in boys, but they believed that girls were fixed in their sense of identity. Due to acceptance of the feminine mystique, educators did not see that girls could be as misguided about their goals.

Instead of inspiring a desire for autonomy in young women, sex-directed educators encouraged them to fulfill their desire for achievement through men. They gave them "a potpourri of liberal-arts courses" that would give them a veneer of sophistication and encouraged them to join programs well below their abilities.

The purpose of this superficial education was to make the women impressive wives—just cultured enough to impress their husband's co-workers and to know how to cook interesting meals and decorate with good taste.

Economists revealed a study that predicted that there would be a decline in employment "for the uneducated and the unskilled." They predicted that women would spend twenty-five years or more working outside of the home. Still, women were unfazed and, with the encouragement of sex-directed educators, only expected to be housewives.

Women never expected that they would have to work outside of the home and, if they had to, they convinced themselves that it was temporary or only to help generate more household income.

Educators who believed in functionalism thought it was more important to focus on the practical perceived needs of their students, such as understanding the roles they would play in marriage. At one famous women's college, Friedan uses the example of the female president to demonstrate the guilt that some ex-feminists felt over encouraging a non-sex-directed education, for a minority of alumnae had complained that their educations had ill-prepared them for their roles as housewives.

Some of the guilt these educators faced was their own for not conforming to the feminine mystique. In other instances, it may have been guilt for encouraging conformity to maintain their own positions. In any case, they listened to a minority of women whose educations reminded them of how isolated they were as housewives.

The students who take courses in "family-life education," such as "Marriage and Family," learn bits and pieces of ideas from Sigmund Freud and Margaret Mead, but not with the necessary backgrounds in psychology and anthropology to contextualize those ideas. The courses encouraged all manner of conformity, advocating the "wrongness" of premarital sex, the notion that successful career women were atypical, that working women usually felt guilty for leaving their children at home, and that "mixed marriages" (marriages between people of different classes or religions) were unwise.

Coursework that validated the feminine mystique used bits of scholarship to sound authoritative. It taught young women that being married required self-denial. The coursework discouraged any self-exploration or fulfillment outside of marriage and childrearing. It also reinforced discrimination and prejudices by discouraging relationships between people from different backgrounds.

Lessons in functionalism were very "soothing" to young women who were afraid to break away from their childhoods and who did not want to work hard in college or develop their own views. Smart, spirited young women learned that it was unwise to talk about intellectual subjects around boys out of fear of being labeled as "brains." Psychologists believed that women's interest "in men and marriage" were defenses against intellectual development. That development, some found, was stunted in girls as young as fourteen or fifteen who showed a drop in their IQ scores due to statements from them, also reflected in their school records, that they thought it wasn't "too smart for a girl to be smart."

In accepting their "functions" as wives and mothers, young women avoided any challenges that could have spurred their intellectual development. They were convinced in girlhood that it would be to their advantage to appear less intelligent to attract boys. They went to college both to meet men and to have enough sophistication to make for impressive wives, but it was thought to be unwise for a woman to strive for intellectual equality with her spouse.

The young women of the Eisenhower era faced a choice between conformity and accepting the growing pains of becoming individuals. Using a study from Vassar College, Friedan observed that, just when many women began to feel "the conflicts" and growing pains of building an identity, they discontinued their growth by leaving school. They did not develop their own interests and, years out of college, sometimes showed signs of being on the verge of nervous breakdowns. Another group of students in the same study had pursued their own interests in college and later became professionals. Their interests in men were more genuine and did not interfere with their educations.

Educated young women who conformed to the feminine mystique sometimes experienced great frustration later in life due to failing to construct identities that were separate from their sex roles. They depended on their husbands and children to compensate for their lack of personal awareness. Women who had developed that awareness in college could pursue more loving relationships with men that were not rooted in co-dependency.

Sex-directed educators offered the following solutions for housewives who outlived their husbands: a course in law to help with matters, such as insurance and estates, early retirement for men so that they could spend more time with their wives, and a "brief fling" with volunteer work or the arts. They could also take a part-time job, as long as it did not take work away from men who needed the income for their families.

Educators did not think that women who had "fulfilled their sex function" could use an education unless it was for the practical purpose of settling legal matters after a spouse's death or of doing something to take up their extra time. Even after their husbands, the wage-earners, were gone, it was assumed that women needed jobs less than men.

Sex-directed educators saw the danger in encouraging domesticity in boys but, due to the feminine mystique, no one thought it was a tragedy when a woman did only one thing with her life. Still, according to Friedan, educators did not bear full blame. Women had made the choice to go back to the home and they were responsible for their choice.

Friedan holds women responsible for dedicating their lives to only one project while watching men pursue many. However, educators were partially to blame for encouraging women to adopt this narrow mindset.

CHAPTER 8: THE MISTAKEN CHOICE

According to Friedan, the feminine mystique took hold after World War II, when both men and women sought the comforts of home and family. The Cold War had created uncertainty. Young men who were too old to return home to their mothers still desired nurturing affection. Young women who had felt lonely during the war were especially vulnerable to the "mystique"—and, when men returned home, had the choice of staying in careers or of having a husband and family.

The feminine mystique developed out of the emotional immaturity of both young men and women, as well as the shock of war, which had created an urgency in them to have families. Women, to avoid loneliness, were eager to agree to men's needs.

The baby boom took place in every country immediately after the war, but the number of American women with three or more children doubled in twenty years. The number of children born to teenagers rose 165 percent. Educated women led the race to have the greatest number of babies.

To make up for their lack of a creative outlet outside of domesticity, women had children. Society, which had convinced women that having children was the most important thing they would ever do, encouraged this.

After the war, women who had been able to afford household servants decided to do all the chores themselves. GIs returned to fill jobs that had been occupied by women while they were gone. Those women who continued to occupy jobs faced discrimination and opposition, which sent some of them "scurrying for the cover of marriage and home."

Women began to believe that housework was their true calling. Initially, this may have been an attempt to help returning GIs feel more secure. Women who remained at work faced anger for their unwillingness to participate in the effort to make returning soldiers feel "at home."

Friedan blames the retreat of women to the home on the "personal retreat" that both men and women seemed to make after the Second World War. Women who had stayed in jobs and fought sexual discrimination during the Great Depression preferred to retreat into sex and love just as men found it easier to forget about their war experience and retreat "into helpless conformity."

Both American men and women became more isolated in the postwar years due to the desire to conform to an ideal of suburban life. Women, who had been more politically active during the 1930s, had become more passive and less interested in engaging with the world outside of the home.

Social scientists and writers found that, for many people, it was "easier and more fashionable" to think about psychology and private problems, such as sex, than to pursue public purposes. The arts, including painting and theater, became devoid of meaning. According to the playwright Tennessee Williams, it seemed that no reality existed for a man except for his sexual perversions and the fact that he both loved and hated his mother.

People retreated to the private sphere and only concerned themselves with private matters, even to the point of obsession. This obsession with private life, fostered by the popularity of psychoanalysis, made people less interested in what they could offer the rest of the world. This tendency toward seclusion reinforced the feminine mystique.

Clergymen and psychologists both reported a retreat into "privatism," or concern only with one's private life and thoughts. This explained both the popularity of Freud's theories and the revival of popular interest in religion. These ideologies, in addition to the move to the suburbs, the five children, and the do-it yourself and "beatnik" trends signaled a collective disinterest in addressing political and social needs.

This inward turn—the concern with private life and thoughts—ironically, did not inspire anyone to think outside of their socially prescribed roles. Even the "beatniks" often replicated traditional gender roles within their unconventional way of life.

In repeating Freudian phrases, which many Americans had read literally, they could pretend that they had understood their problems when they had barely begun to face them. The mother was particularly to blame for problems in the child who sometimes grew into a "neurotic," "alcoholic," or "suicidal" adult. She was portrayed as a "nagging" wife and a mother who was simultaneously "rejecting" and "overprotecting."

Because women bore the overwhelming amount of responsibility for the rearing of children, they were also the first to blame if their children grew up to be unhappy, maladjusted adults. Freudian psychoanalysis reinforced this with its idea of the "devouring mother."

The negative view of mothers coincided with the increased independence of women during the war. American GIs returning home could see that American women were more independent than the German and Japanese women they had met. Thus, the neuroses of children "past and present" were blamed on the increased individuality and independence of these women.

Returning GIs had expected women to play nurturing roles. If they were more independent, they would be less likely to conform to this role. The GIs, failing to understand key societal differences, had compared American women to those whom they had met in distressed nations—women who were dependent out of desperation.

Many women, especially educated women, were frustrated and taking it out on their husbands and children. More American men, women, and children were visiting psychiatrists and mental hospitals. The Freudian rationale blamed this on women having been "masculinized" by their educations. However, the neuroses of soldiers, supposedly stemming from childhood, could not be blamed on career women. The GIs' mothers had been "self-sacrificing, dependent" housewives. Research showed that they had little interest in anything beyond home, family, and beauty routines.

Instead of examining the construction of their households, American families retreated further within and consulted psychoanalysis to uncover their problems, which merely reinforced the "mystique." Former GIs expected their wives to play the role of their mothers, who had been constant presences when they were growing up.

Evidence showed that the GIs had been raised by mothers who had never "reached or were encouraged to reach maturity" and had "devoted *too* much of their lives to their children." By the mid-1940s, the feminine mystique was encouraging a new generation of women to do the same thing.

The feminine mystique had encouraged a cycle in which dependent women raised boys who became men who expected dependency and self-denial from their future wives, based on the examples their mothers had set.

Early research by Alfred Kinsey had linked women's sexual frustration to education. A decade later, his research said the opposite, showing, based on 5,940 case studies, that "the number of females reaching orgasm nearly 100 percent of the time, *was* related to education." The more educated a woman was, the likelier she was to be sexually fulfilled.

More educated women were likelier to have greater knowledge of their bodies, as well as the confidence to express themselves in intimate moments. Women who had devoted themselves to the feminine mystique would perform for men's pleasure while neglecting their own.

Studies that suggested that children who were being neglected and rejected did not get as much publicity as those that showed that working women were happier and more mature mothers than those who did not work. Though studies showed no more delinquency or school truancy among the children of career women than among those of housewives, reports still warned that delinquency was more common among the children of working women.

Some research was biased to uphold the feminine mystique. Though working mothers were often happier mothers than those who had devoted themselves full-time to their households and families—and statistics confirmed this—social scientists refuted their own research to discourage women from pursuing careers.

Many studies were presented as "proof" that women could not combine the demands of work and motherhood. However, one researcher, the psychologist Lois Meek Stolz found that the children of mothers who work are less likely than housewives' children to be "disturbed," to "have problems in school," or to "lack a sense of personal worth."

Work not only benefitted women, but also children, who learned to be more self-reliant. Without their mothers performing all tasks for them, children felt more confident in their abilities and developed self-esteem. Working women experienced the same benefits.

In American culture, the notion of the always-present mother prevailed. It is possible that the constant presence of mothers, of women who only existed as mothers, contributed to their children's neuroses. The famed Dr. Spock contrasted this tendency with that of Russian women who seemed to have more "stable" children while also having a purpose in their lives beyond motherhood, usually a professional pursuit.

The "always-present mother" may have made children feel secure, but their mothers' co-dependency reinforced their own co-dependency. Moreover, the constant watchful presences of their mothers created anxiety, for the children would worry about acting in ways that would displease their mothers.

One study looked at strongly maternal women who had produced sons so infantile that one twelve-year-old boy had temper tantrums when his mother refused to butter his toast. The findings revealed that the mothers used the children to satisfy "an abnormal craving for love" and devoted all their attention to the children, especially if they were sons. These mothers and their husbands were also the children of domineering mothers.

Women trapped in the feminine mystique had co-dependent mothers and only knew how to parent in that way. Because their spouses had had similar mothers, there was no countering influence. Thus, the children of these women expected their mothers to perform all tasks for them—even those they could perform themselves—due to being accustomed to overprotection.

Researchers checked on the mothers and their "infantile" children years later and found that the pathological behavior had stopped because the mothers, "by circumstance," had found an activity of their own, and that the children had found "an area of independence" that did not involve their mothers.

Work and hobbies created outlets for individual expression, as well as the ability of mothers and children to build relationships beyond the household. This built self-sufficiency which discouraged the co-dependent behavior.

The sociologist Arnold Green discovered, through his study of a predominately Polish town in Massachusetts, that children thrived with more independence and freedom from the home and parents. Neuroses arose in children whose mothers had absorbed their personalities. Green had mainly looked at these occurrences in sons, and many people had seen the son's inability to achieve independence as tragic, but they did not feel this way about daughters.

The "symbiosis" effect had not fostered healthy "togetherness" and it had not made children feel more secure. Instead, it created anxieties in children who did not have the privacy to form their own identities. Green's finding showed that some independence from parents was essential to foster growth, but a bias against girls did not recognize their equal need for independence.

No one worried over the "waste of a human self" in women, but instead "applauded" a woman's acceptance of her "role as a woman." Women who felt their lack of selfhood did not understand the feeling, thus, it became the problem that has no name. They sometimes looked to their children to fix the problem, which perpetuated the cycle of dependency.

When women dedicated their lives to their families, people viewed them as caring and dedicated to their roles as homemakers. However, this selflessness had not created, in many of them, satisfaction with their life choice. This resulted in an unhealthy attachment to their children whom they believed gave them purpose.

The pressures of American life "kept a man from feeling like a man." He took his frustrations with "never-ceasing competition" and "purposeless work" out on his wife or mother. He rationalized his participation by saying that he was "in it for the wife and kids" and believed that his wife was lucky to be able to stay home. Men accepted the feminine mystique because it promised them mothers for the rest of their lives.

Men, too, were trapped in lives they did not want and worked in jobs that did not fulfill them, due to the pressure of being good providers—that is, making enough money to afford a house in the suburbs and all of the things they believed their wives wanted to consume. Each spouse believed that the other had an advantage.

Women traded in their individuality for security because freedom scared them. They were the daughters of mothers who made it hard for them to grow up and they existed in a culture that told them that they did not have to. The nation depended on "women's passive dependence, their femininity."

Women who obeyed the feminine mystique had repeated the cycle of previous generations of women who allowed the culture to convince them that they could avoid the hardships of life through choosing to fulfill their sex role.

CHAPTER 9: THE SEXUAL SELL

Friedan posits that the perpetuation of housewifery and the feminine mystique occurred when industry leaders realized that women were the chief consumers. There was no conspiracy to oppress women, but instead "the subversion of women's lives in America to the ends of business" was merely a means to an end, a way to keep the "affluent economy" going by exploiting the housewife market.

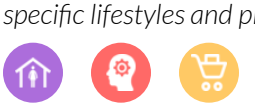
Postwar economies were driven by consumerism. Advertisers convinced women who were dissatisfied with some aspect of their lives that they could fix the problem through the purchase of products. Suburban housewives, who were often dissatisfied and had a lot of disposable income, were an ideal market.

American businesses exploited the "uncreative" lives that many housewives led by making them think that they could find joy and purpose in buying things.

Shopping gave bored housewives something to do—hunting for bargains or looking for innovative products.

Using a national survey of 4,500 wives, a publisher of "a leading women's magazine" divided American women into three categories to learn their opinions about electrical appliances. They included "The True Housewife Type," "The Career Woman," and "The Balanced Homemaker."

Though Friedan dismisses the notion that advertisers conspired against American women, they did carefully target women with specific lifestyles and planned ad campaigns to appeal to each type.



The True Housewife Type, whose existence was justified by housework, represented the largest market for appliances. However, she was sometimes reluctant to use devices that rendered her old-fashioned methods obsolete. Marketers found that this group of women was diminishing and would probably continue to new fields of interest and education that were becoming available to women.

The True Housewife "type" was an old-fashioned woman, perhaps rural or older, which would explain the diminishing demographic. More couples lived in the suburbs than in the country, closer to amenities, and women were getting married younger and learning sooner about available appliances.

The Career Woman represented a minority that advertisers did not want to become larger. She had often never had a job, but she thought that housework was a waste of time and, if her children were older, she would have spent more time outside of the home and might have gotten a job.

The advertisers' purpose was to convince this woman, who did not believe in the role created for her by the feminine mystique, that she was better off at home. If they could engage her curiosity enough, she would stay where she "belonged."

"The Balanced Homemaker" was the ideal type for advertisers because, unlike "the true housewife," she had some outside interests and was open to the help that appliances offered. She could be encouraged to believe that homemaking was an "art" that "should be the goal of every normal woman."

This type accepted her sex role and believed that housewifery was an occupation. The appliances did not really offer "help" because she still spent most of her time on housework, but they made her feel that she got more done.

Seventy-five percent of all consumer advertising was directed at housewives. Product designers created new gadgets that contributed to giving them a sense of achievement and yet, maintained housework as their main purpose. The "manipulator" with whom Friedan consulted uses the advertisement of a baking mix as an example of the way in which advertising could capitalize on American women's need to do creative work. Instead of merely baking bread, she could use the mix to create many different baked goods and thus feel creative. Advertisers were supposed to de-emphasize the ease with which she could do this to avoid her "underlying guilt" over feeling that she never did enough.

Housewives who were bored in their roles needed gimmicks that helped them feel creative, but not so creative that they got the idea that they should be doing other things with their lives. After all, they were still using a prepared mix. The "guilt" that advertisers de-emphasized was derived from her sense of being outwardly defined. She existed to address the needs of her family who would always appreciate new things to eat. Therefore, the creativity was still directed outward, for the family more than her own satisfaction.

By the mid-1950s, consumer surveys had revealed that the Career Woman was gone. She was replaced by a less sophisticated consumer who did some work in the Parent-Teacher Association, or PTA. She thought she was the equal of men, but found in housework a way to express her "femininity and individuality." Advertisers needed to manipulate her feeling of never having enough to do and her desire to feel creative. The only trouble was that this type could not be influenced by her neighbors, but tended to "use her own mind and her own judgment."

This type was a woman who quietly wanted to work, and therefore found ways to be useful in the community without disturbing her sex role. The feminine mystique had convinced her that she was more useful at home. However, she maintained her individuality, which made her less vulnerable to peer pressure.

Advertisers and manufacturers tried to convince housewives that housework was fun. They made her feel like an expert in her field by giving her different products to perform different tasks. They also emphasized her perceived "know-how" by helping women use their minds and create various household cleaning tricks.

Advertisers marketed appliances and cleaning devices to convince women that each was more efficient than the next at finding and clearing dirt. They marketed cleaning products, too, in ways that explained their removal of dirt as a complex science to appeal to this type's curiosity.

To maintain women's interest in housework, which many of them hated, sellers marketed more products and made the instructions more complicated. Sellers also exploited housewives' "guilt over the hidden dirt" in their homes and encouraged a sense of achievement for every household task completed.

If a woman's "occupation" was housework, advertisers could exploit her fear of being an inefficient "employee" by convincing her to buy more effective tools to help her work. She would buy more tools that she believed made her successful.

In the 1950s, advertisers discovered the teenage market. Young women who had married out of high school were insecure and, therefore, easy marketing targets. Advertisers convinced teenaged couples that they could achieve middle-class status by buying things. Young wives could even be "safely encouraged" to get part-time jobs to help their husbands buy things.

Teenage girls who had accepted the feminine mystique and were eager to conform to the role of housewife wanted the items, or "props," that would help them more effectively play the role. They wanted the items that signaled middle-class comfort—and they had the energy to work to obtain those items.

Advertisers exploited the teenage bride's desire to find fulfillment and purpose in being a housewife. They exploited these desires in their campaign to sell sterling silver. They began trying to influence girls while they were still in school, using peer pressure, as well as the influence of educators, TV programs, and social clubs, to get them to buy silver. Regarding the older, more independent wife, advertisers sought to make her feel guilty for her uses of cheap, disposable materials. She was encouraged to see sterling silver as a part of herself and a tradition that she could offer her children.

Sterling silver was an item that signaled middle-class respectability. Advertisers sought out teenage girls for their impressionability as well as their eagerness to become housewives. Buying sterling would help them feel more grown-up and make it appear that they thought about the future, for the intent of buying good silver was to pass it down to one's daughter who would perpetuate the traditions of housewifery and consumption.

The fur industry also started working on teenage girls to reverse the reputation of fur-wearing women as "predatory" and as "kept women." Instead, they encouraged the association of fur with femininity and with women passing a tradition down to their daughters.

Fur had been associated with luxury or with a gift that men gave their mistresses. A woman who was "other-directed," or primarily concerned with the housewife-mother role, would not focus so much on her appearance.

Fur advertisers also addressed the product's reputation for "ego-orientation" by saying that a family would take pride in a mother who wears fur. Thus, the housewife's guilt in doing something for herself is transformed into benefiting the whole family by looking good.

Because housewives defined their worth according to how well they served their families' needs, including the family's need to be proud of the housewife-mother, advertisers could convince them to buy a fur coat to improve the family's image of her.

Any creative urges a housewife had were to be channeled into her home and family. The sewing industry combated the feeling that sewing was "dull" by creating patterns for housewives to follow. This allowed her some individual expression without being too creative, required her to use some intelligence, and played into her insecurity about not wanting "to be dressed too differently" from other women.

Advertisers wanted the housewife to feel that she was doing something that was interesting so that she would buy more patterns. However, the patterns also had to mirror the clothes that other wives wore. The twin emphases on feeling creative while being like everyone else ensured consumer satisfaction.

Surveys showed that women's needs for "education" and their desire to be a part of the world could be satisfied through shopping. Being in department stores relieved their isolation. Buying things at a bargain made housewives feel successful.

In stores, they saw other women like themselves, which reinforced their sense of playing the right social role. They also got the opportunity to feel that they contributed financially by saving money.

The surveys revealed other desires that could be addressed through product sales, such as needs for privacy in the age of "togetherness" and the "missing sexual spark" in marriage which consumers could supposedly recover by buying products that had been advertised using sex.

Advertisers had been so successful in making housewives obedient consumers that the women believed that they could form relationships through products, as opposed to working on building intimacy.

Consumer researchers understood American housewives in ways that Freudian therapists and sociologists did not. However, they were guilty of using their knowledge of her needs for fulfilment beyond homemaking to sell her things that would never really fulfill those needs but would always keep her wanting more. The advertisers did not invent the feminine mystique, but they were "the most powerful of its perpetuators." They flattered the housewife, diverted her guilt, and hid her growing sense of emptiness and dissatisfaction.

Advertisers appealed to housewives by showing them idealized visions of themselves—attractive women who had earned the love of their families by providing beautiful, clean homes. They distracted her from her boredom by giving her more items with which she could perform household tasks. Advertisers convinced women that they needed to consume if they wanted to be valued.

Like a "primitive culture" that sacrifices its girls to tribal gods, American culture sacrificed its girls to the feminine mystique to ensure the sales of products. The power and intelligence of women was turned against them to groom them into good consumers. Friedan wonders if it is only "a sick society," or an "immature" one, that makes women into housewives instead of people. Maybe it is only immature men and women who can retreat from society and its challenges to live in a "thing-ridden house" and make that their life's purpose.

America's consumer culture, created by both advertisers and prosperous Americans who were eager to consume products to show their status, worked to create a society that turned women into a "market." Men and women who had married too young to understand what they truly wanted out of life were vulnerable to advertisers who were eager to tell them what they should want.

CHAPTER 10: HOUSEWIFERY EXPANDS TO FILL THE TIME AVAILABLE

Friedan went in search of a real-life example of the happy, modern housewife. In some instances, she found women who had transitioned from housewifery to careers. In other instances, she found women who fit "the new image of feminine fulfillment," but Friedan wondered if they were truly fulfilled. In one upper middle-class community, "there were twenty-eight wives," some who had graduated from college and others who had quit. Their husbands were professionals. Only one wife was a career woman, the others were devoted to family life and spent a little time doing community work. Most had had natural childbirths, breast-fed their babies, and were pregnant at or near the age of forty. They were so devoted to the feminine mystique that they encouraged their daughters to become "a wife and mother, like mummy."

Friedan found women who had devoted themselves to the ideal of femininity. Though their husbands still retained contact with the world outside of their families and their communities, most of these women were relatively isolated and mostly communicated with other women like themselves. This isolation led them to see their roles as not only normal, but natural. The sole "career woman" was an outlier in the group. Because so many women viewed their gender roles as "normal," they expected their daughters to perform the same role and instilled the message into the children before they were old enough to challenge the message.

When Friedan looked deeper, she saw that "sixteen out of twenty-eight" of these women were in analysis. Most were taking tranquilizers, and a few had attempted suicide. Others had been hospitalized for depression or psychosis. Twelve of them were having extramarital affairs "in fact or fantasy." These housewives, who were envied for their homes, marriages, and children, could not find fulfillment in anything. They had a sense of purpose when their children were little. Some, therefore, continued to have children, but they knew that they could not keep having babies just to feel like somebody.

Though these women represented an ideal and worked hard to create the appearance of happiness, they were discontent. Their longing to express themselves creatively manifested in having more children, which was the only way in which they believed they could contribute to the world. Because their sense of creativity relied on their sex function, they could only feel a sense of value by having children.

Friedan noted that the housewives in this community were always busy with chores, chauffeuring their children, gardening, or helping with homework. She studied two households in which two wives in their thirties lived. Mrs. W. was a full-time housewife who was busy for most of the day with household duties. Mrs. D. was a microbiologist who did her chores before work. Friedan wonders why Mrs. W. claimed never to have additional time, not even to read in the evenings, when she lived in a house that was the same size as Mrs. D.'s.

To feel as though they were doing something important with their lives, women constantly performed tasks around the house or in service of their families. Because housework did not consume the time of an actual job, they had to expand it to make it feel more substantive. The result was that they had little time left to perform other activities.

Friedan found the same pattern when comparing women who identified as "housewives" to career women, both in the suburbs and in the cities. Housewives always seemed to spend more time on housework—a phenomenon which Friedan attributed to the expansion of housework, "mother-work," and other household duties to make up for her lack of a function in society. Appliances did not, in fact, save the housewife time. Instead, they compelled her to spend even more time on household chores than her mother did. The boredom and the "empty feeling" that housewives experienced led them to perform more chores than necessary.

Women had conformed to the idea that they were serving their social function as wives and mothers who were committed to housework. However, serving this function did not stimulate them or relieve their feeling of not having anything to do. Due to their commitment to the feminine mystique, they dedicated themselves to performing more chores instead of finding other ways to occupy their time.

Women, Friedan discovered, tended to move to the suburbs after deciding to give up a "job or profession" to become "a full-time housewife." On the other hand, a woman who pursues a "definite professional goal is less likely to move to the suburbs." Women in the suburbs tend not to take on interesting community work out of fear that it will take time away from their families. Thus, the interesting volunteer jobs, particularly leadership posts, are filled by men.

American families believed that suburban life was most compatible with family life. Women gave up their active lives in the city to settle full-time in their homes and into the work of maintaining their homes. Though they were interested in serving others outside of the family, the "mystique" convinced them they should remain at home.

Friedan notes the popularity of open-plan houses and how they do not really offer any privacy—they are "one free-flowing room where women can expand their housework and never really be alone." The housewife convinces herself that she must always watch after her children, lest they be deprived of something in her absence.

The "symbiosis" concept fostered the idea that the mother should always be present—always visible, even—to her children so that they would never feel abandoned. This idea was even manifested in the architecture of the time, which eliminated the boundaries that gave a sense of privacy.

The trend of "togetherness" convinced many women that the key to happiness lay in sharing in their husband and children's lives. They insisted that their husbands share the housework, but that still did not compensate for the feeling housewives had of being "shut out of the larger world."

When husbands helped with housework, they were fulfilling one role in their lives among others. For women, the performance of household chores was their only role. Their commitment to their singular role insulated them from society.

A male Minneapolis schoolteacher undermined the notion that a housewife's work was an "interminable chore" by taking over a suburban home and performing all necessary chores and other household duties within a day. Studies validated his claim that women were working "more than twice as hard as thy should."

When a working man performed the same work that a housewife performed each day, his example proved that, when one was free of guilt or was dedicated to other things in life outside of housework, they could perform household chores easily and quickly, then move on to other activities.

Housewives complained of an incessant "tired feeling" which doctors either dismissed or attempted to treat with pills, vitamins, injections, diets, or tranquilizers. Other doctors found that women got "as much or more sleep than they [needed]" and attributed the feeling to boredom.

To avoid having to face the dullness of their day-to-day lives, women retreated into sleep. This preference for sleep suggests a wish for death, or unconsciousness, to avoid the incessant sense of purposelessness.

Women's magazines published ideas for "cures" for fatigue, including more praise from husbands, not demanding too much from oneself, and trying to find honest enjoyment in one aspect of the job, such as cooking. For the housewives whom Friedan interviewed, the problem was not having too much to do, "but too little." Those who had nothing to do passed the time by drinking alcohol or eating excessively.

Boredom had resulted in harmful and addictive behavior. Women relied on food and alcohol to provide them with comfort or to give them something to do. Women's magazines reinforced the mystique by encouraging women to focus more on housework to feel happy or to remain "other-directed" by relying on praise.

Some social critics commented that when men performed chores, the chores interfered with their careers. However, Friedan found that men did not allow housework to interfere with their careers. When men did housework, it was because their wives worked or made a career out of housework, which made them unable to complete all tasks. When housework did expand to fill a man's available time, it seemed to be an excuse "for not meeting the challenge of their own careers."

Housework could serve as a distraction for either gender in instances in which boredom took over one's life. Friedan's study shows that women were not naturally more inclined to do housework, but focused on it more out of the sense of having nothing else to do. Men were more likely to help with housework when their wives were not housewives who made chores their job.

Women who could afford servants fired them so that they could dedicate more time to housework, due to an inability to find any other activities that would give them a sense of purpose. Though the housewife expanded her time available to perform housework, it still presented little challenge or stimulation to the adult mind. Some housewives tried to make up for the lack of a challenge by becoming home "experts." This made the women hard to live with, for the wives sometimes treated their husbands like "part-time servants."

The tendency to become domestic "experts" was the result of advertising, which made housewives feel that housework was a career of sorts, as well as of the feminine mystique more generally, which had convinced women that the household was their rightful domain. The sense of expertise convinced them that there was no better way to spend their time, an attitude that impacted their sense of intimacy with their husbands.

CHAPTER 11: THE SEX-SEEKERS

When Friedan asked housewives what they did with their time when they were not doing chores, or asked them about their interests or ambitions, the subject usually came around to sex. Women were eager to talk about their sexual adventures but, when they spoke, Friedan noted that they sounded "unsexual."

The women's "eager" but unerotic tone suggested that sex was merely another thing to do to pass the time. Their association of sex with Friedan's question of interests further attested to their complete identification with their gender role.

Women talked about having sex to "feel alive." One woman had affairs to enjoy the feeling of giving herself over to someone completely. She had first felt that feeling with her husband when they married, but then he became too preoccupied with his work. She then experienced the feeling again after her children were born. The feeling only occurred when she was in love. So, she went to Mexico to have an affair with a man with whom she was not in love, but who had inspired the feeling that she desired. She returned six months later, having failed to recover "her phantom feeling," and resume her marriage.

The feminine mystique had convinced women that they could feel most fulfilled through the expression of their sex function, which either meant that they should have sex or have children, or both. Their sense of being "other-directed" made it more difficult for them to achieve stimulation through individual activities. Their desperation led them to take risks that compromised their marriages. Danger also stimulated them.

The suburban "sex-seekers" could not expand housework or community work to fill the time available, so they turned to sex to feel fulfilled. Sex was "the only frontier," available to women living according to the feminine mystique. American women, according to Friedan, had been reduced to sex creatures as a result. The culture, too, had become "sex-glutted," but it had not resulted in fulfillment for women. Worse, their "aggressive pursuit of sexual fulfillment" caused sexual disinterest in American men and bred hostility toward women.

Friedan's description of sex as a "frontier" suggests that sexual exploration was the only form of exploration available to many women. To avoid their feelings of boredom due to a lack of creative outlets, women pursued sex more vigorously than they would have if they had other things to do. Men, feeling more pressure to perform, resented this.

According to Alfred Kinsey, there was an enormous increase in sexual preoccupation in the postwar era, but no "outlet." There were constant references to sex in media and an increase in the publication and sales of lascivious best-selling novels marketed to women. Women seemed to be more preoccupied with sex than men and this avidity played out in films and novels in the late-1950s and early-1960s, including *La Dolce Vita*—an Italian film that drew American audiences for "its much-advertised sexual titillation"—and novels, like *Peyton Place* and *The Chapman Report*, which also drew on the image of the "over-lusting female."

The preoccupation with sex in the Eisenhower era was often superficial. In American films, or in films in which American women were depicted, actresses appeared in roles that exaggerated their sexual characteristics and presented them as "over-lusting," or excessively desirous with no context for the hypersexual behavior. The effect on the culture was the that people developed the impression that women were always available for or desirous of sex.

Suburban women were usually "sex-seekers," not "sex-finders" due to needing to look after their children, trying to avoid being the subject of gossip, and the fact that men were usually absent and less preoccupied with sex as a result of having other things to do and think about.

Though housewives sometimes used sex to avoid feelings of boredom, the pursuit of an affair often took more time than the affair itself due to her need to find a man and to plan carefully in order to be discreet.

Many housewives staked their identities on their sex role, using sex to feel "alive" and thus, placing impossible demands on their "femaleness" and their husbands' "maleness" to make up for their failure "to achieve goals and satisfactions in the wider community." Kinsey found, based on a survey of 5,940 women, that the sexual appetites of wives seemed to increase while those of their husbands waned. More disturbingly, sexual anxieties were causing reproductive dysfunction.

Housewives wanted to feel and make themselves appear more desirable. Instead of using sex to learn more about themselves and their responses to pleasure, they retreated further into the sex role and expected their husbands to do the same. The increased appetites of wives resulted in husbands becoming more distant, probably as a response to their wives' excessive dependency.

Obstetricians observed that women who had dedicated their lives to having babies were usually the ones who had the most trouble—backaches, bleeding, and difficult pregnancies and deliveries—while, those who had other interests had easier pregnancies and deliveries.

Friedan suggests that the physical ailments women experienced in childbirth may have resulted from the anxiety that is more common in women who connect their sense of self-worth to childbearing.

A gynecologist spoke of women who had not attained fulfillment from having babies or sexual intercourse. They continued to have babies for a lack of anything else to do. Other patients were college girls for whom "going to bed [meant] nothing." It was merely something to do for a lack of anything better to do.

The reliance on sex to relieve boredom, as well as the excessive attention given to sex in the culture, had desensitized women. They offered themselves sexually because they believed it was what they were supposed to do.

Friedan wonders if the high incidence of "cramps with menstruation," "depression with childbirth," and other "female troubles" are natural to women or if they are related to the "choice between femininity and human growth."

Friedan tries to connect menstrual symptoms with anxiety, but she overlooks the real incidences of women having uterine problems such as endometriosis and painful periods.

Friedan reports on an island where attractive young housewives spent their summers. There, they enjoyed the company of "sexless boys right out of the world of Tennessee Williams," while their husbands were working in the city.

Friedan's description suggests that the "boys" were homosexuals whom the women sought out for company. She suggests this with the reference to Tennessee Williams, who was gay himself and wrote gay male characters into his plays.

Women demanded too much satisfaction from their husbands—not only sexual satisfaction, but also the status-seeking that they could only realize vicariously through their husbands. Young men began to feel trapped by their wives who had turned men into "the sex-instrument" or the "man around the house." Those husbands began to seek divorces and felt growing hostility, not only toward their wives, but also toward their mothers, female co-workers, and women in general.

Women's excessive demands, both for sexual pleasure and for a sense of achievement through their husband's accomplishments, made men feel inadequate. Their feeling of not being enough manifested as anger. Furthermore, men assumed that their wives' behavior was typical of the female sex (instead of a byproduct of an oppressive society), which only fostered greater misogyny.

Alfred Kinsey found that "the majority of middle-class" American men stopped having sex with their wives after fifteen years of marriage. They had affairs instead—office romances, casual or intense affairs—in an attempt to escape from the devouring wife. Some chose to have affairs with Lolita types, either in fantasy or in fact, to escape from the grown-up woman at home and "her aggressive energies."

Men, too, used sex to escape from their obligations at home. The attraction to the "Lolita" type was an expression of the desire for the "child-wife" whom they had expected to marry. They wanted a woman who would be eager to satisfy, them but would ask for little in return.

Male hostility toward women was particularly evident in postwar literature, which was full of "images of the predatory female." The male outrage, according to Friedan, was the result of "parasitic women" who stunted their sons' and husbands' development.

Friedan uses the phrase "parasitic women" to suggest that the feminine mystique had encouraged excessive co-dependency which conflicted with cultural messages that told boys to be self-reliant.

Friedan wonders if the increase in "overt male homosexuality" is attached to the feminine mystique. She thinks that there is a correlation, due to the tendency of women to live through their sons, rendering them "child-like" and hateful toward all women as a reaction to the one woman who prevented them from achieving manhood. Friedan writes that, like the daughters of the feminine mystique who raised them, homosexual men often live in sexual fantasy, and were characterized by immaturity and promiscuity. They lacked commitments "in life outside of sex."

Friedan reiterates the prejudices of her time in regard to homosexual men, whom she seems to discuss as though there were no homosexual women. She seems not to realize that the illegality of homosexual acts, as well as the belief that it was a mental illness, made it very difficult for homosexuals to build stable, long-term relationships. Here, she is guilty of the mistake of misapplying Freudian analysis to explain complex social phenomena.

Friedan found a correlation between education and the postponement of sexual activity. Better-educated people usually waited to have sex. Young women who continued their education into college and graduate school also reported more sexual satisfaction.

People who had their own interests were less "other-directed" and tended to focus on their own needs. When they did become sexually active, they took an interest in their own pleasure.

Psychiatrists believed that compulsive sexual activity, whether homosexual or heterosexual, was a sign of low self-esteem. College girls, for instance, sometimes sought security through sexual relationships with boys to assuage "feelings of inadequacy."

Having sex could make one feel attractive or desirable. If a girl was unsure about herself in other areas of life, she could still rely on the culture's message that her sex function gave her value.

Friedan voices concern over the prevalence of "sex without self," or using sex to evade the responsibilities of enduring discomfort, which was a part of growing up. The "pursuit of pleasure and things" merely shielded young people from their complex reality.

The pursuit of objects and fleeting pleasures could not replace the necessity of constructing a sense of self. Young people used objects and sexual attraction to feel good about themselves instead of developing self-understanding.

CHAPTER 12: PROGRESSIVE DEHUMANIZATION: THE COMFORTABLE CONCENTRATION CAMP

Friedan observes a "frightening passivity" and "boredom" in American children who perform all the activities they are supposed to perform, but without interest. Students in college were especially "apathetic." They were disinterested in their courses, which they took merely to find certain jobs, and were incapable of planning activities. A curriculum geared toward the students' interests was no longer suitable, for they had no strong interests.

Young people lacked the vibrant and curious personalities of previous generations. They treated school not as a learning opportunity but as something to train them for the work that they would need to do to earn money to be good consumers. Building a financial prospect was their only interest.

The new passivity was evident, according to Friedan, in the apparition of the "bearded, undisciplined beatnik," as well as in the rising rates of juvenile delinquency, school dropouts, contractions of venereal disease, and illegitimate pregnancies.

Sex without interest had resulted in a lack of concern for healthcare, but Friedan does not mention how a lack of sex education also contributed.

Those who studied the passive behavior did not blame it on boredom, but on a deterioration of character that was also visible among American GIs who were prisoners of war in Korea. The new GIs became inert in the camps—they did not acquire food or firewood or bother to keep themselves clean.

The GIs' superiors had the typical view of elders—that the succeeding generation was less hearty than they. They relied on an anecdotal example to validate their view.

Friedan attributes the passivity in boys and girls to mothers who live within the feminine mystique, which dictates that they should live through their children and suffer their children's distresses and failures as though they were their own. Pop psychology had encouraged this fusion of mothers and children through the promotion of the "symbiosis" concept, which insisted that a mother's constant loving care was necessary for a child's emotional growth and should be available "for an indeterminate number of years."

The "symbiosis" concept had convinced mothers that the best way to parent was to identify completely with the experience of their children. This method discouraged the child's understanding of him or herself as a distinct individual and resulted in confusion of the mother's role, which, through her identification, seemed to be that of a peer, not a parent.

The "symbiosis" resulted in disturbed children who were "acting out" the wishes and fantasies of their parents. Parents trying to realize their dreams through their children is nothing new, but the difference in the 1950s was that the mothers were "infantile" and sought gratification through their children because they did not know how to gratify themselves.

Children tried to conform to their parents' expectations instead of forming their own desires. This differed from previous generations due to the excessive presence of the mother and her over-reliance on her children for her own sense of validation.

According to the psychiatrist Andras Angyal, there are two ways of evading growth: noncommitment and vicarious living. An uncommitted person goes through life "playing a role," taking on jobs and marriages without being committed to any of them. Vicarious living denies one's own personality in favor of another, perhaps the one that is most popular at the time.

Many housewives had assumed the role without thinking about whether they wanted to or if the role was suited to them. To conform to the feminine mystique, some women pretended to take an interest in housework and mothering when they would have been better suited to other things.

To Friedan, noncommitment and vicarious living were the methods by which women who were trapped in the feminine mystique lived their lives. Playing roles had left them confused about who they really were; in a few cases, it led to suicide.

The absence of a sense of identity had left some women so lost that they felt no reason to continue living. The feminine mystique had left them with no sense of purpose.

In the 1950s, "the housewife's syndrome" included mild symptoms, such as "bleeding blisters" and "nervousness," as well as more severe conditions, such as heart attacks, bleeding ulcers, hypertension, and psychotic breakdowns.

Just as anxiety could create reproductive dysfunction, it also resulted in other maladies. The "mistaken choice" had not only resulted in a kind of psychic death, it threatened one's mortality.

The greater rate of breakdowns existed among "housewife-mothers" who shared certain characteristics in common. They had quit high school or college and came from backgrounds that had traditionally encouraged dependency among women. They had never done anything on their own, so they had never learned how to handle the stress of hard work. They had no ambitions other than to marry an ambitious man.

The women Friedan describes were completely reliant on their husbands, due to their lack of an education and the fact that they had never pursued any independent activity. Unlike some other women, they had no memory of independence before marriage. This made them feel more deeply trapped by the "mystique" and more convinced that there was no other option for women.

Sometimes, in their drive to be very good wives and mothers, "housewife-mothers" ended up playing a very "masculine," dominant role. The housewife-mother dominated her children's lives, nagged her husband to perform household tasks, managed the finances, and supervised education and recreation.

Because she relied on her husband and children to feel successful and worthwhile, they had to conform to her image of what success looked like. Therefore, the home and the family had to maintain an appearance of excellence.

An investigation into an affluent Westchester community with a "world famous" school system discovered graduates with excellent grades who performed poorly in college. Investigators discovered that the students' mothers had been doing their homework, even writing their term papers.

The mothers' obsession with their children's academic success caused them to miss the point of education: the enrichment of their children's minds. This purpose mattered less than satisfying the mother's need to see her children outperform others—at least "on paper."

Children who never achieve selfhood usually have emotionally immature mothers. The mother's constant care of her children is not a natural response, but the result of her idea of what good mothering ought to look like.

Mothers had learned this idea from social scientists who had advocated functionalism and the "symbiosis" concept. Freudian theory suggested that this was the only normal way for them to attain a sense of achievement.

Young women whose overly involved mothers had pushed them into early sexuality became housewives who continued to evade emotional growth. In some communities, such as Bergen County, New Jersey, the rate of marital separation, which precedes divorce, was 100% during the 1950s. This was the result of early sexualization. Millions of young people in the 1960s married before the age of twenty. Girls married because they did not want to work anymore and young men married to get regular sex and "a motherly woman in the house."

By marrying before they had achieved a sense of individuality, couples relied too much on their partners for satisfaction. Young men did not want partners as much as they wanted mothers, to replace the overly-involved mothers whose homes they had just left. The feminine mystique had created a cycle in which people shirked personal growth in favor of the comforts of sex and motherliness.

As women became more passive, men became more hostile. If a woman felt hostile toward her husband, she did not "dare" take it out on him but exercised her hostility on their child. The University of Colorado Hospital reported 302 cases of child battery within a single year. Experts predicted that child abuse would become a more frequent cause of death than diseases, such as "leukemia, cystic fibrosis, and muscular dystrophy."

Frustration with the sense that circumstances could not change led some mothers to take out their frustrations on their children. Friedan makes a generalization here, not accounting for numerous other factors—poverty, mental illness, alcoholism—that would have contributed. However, immaturity could have been a factor, too.

Immaturity in human relationships had resulted in youth worship, a "sick love affair" with one's own children, sex that was "divorced from a human framework," and a series of stories that portrayed love affairs between humans and animals. This would continue as long as the feminine mystique encouraged women to avoid their own growth in favor of a "passive childlike dependency."

Men and women could not get to know each other, for they had never gotten to know themselves. To avoid self-knowledge, they took refuge in childhood. The fascinations with children and animals may have been a form of transference: an expression of women's desire to be doted upon unconditionally.

Friedan insists that being a housewife often resulted in "a sense of emptiness" and "non-existence" similar to that experienced by prisoners in Nazi camps who "surrendered their human identity." Friedan turns to reports on the observations of the psychoanalyst and educational psychologist Bruno Bettelheim who noted that when prisoners entered the Nazi camps, they were cut off from their adult interests. The only world that mattered was that of the concentration camp. As they became more preoccupied with their basic animal needs, such as their waning sexualities, they lost their human identities.

Friedan makes this shocking connection to awaken the reader, for whom the shock of the Holocaust would have been relatively recent, to the depth of damage that obedience to the feminine mystique wreaked on women's psyches. In Friedan's view, the Holocaust was a human rights tragedy, but society's determination to oppress women was also a violation of human rights. Society's indifference to the problem suggested that women had been deemed less than human.

It brought the prisoners some comfort to know that everyone was in the same circumstance. However, no camaraderie grew out of this knowledge. They instead became filled with rage. Yet, they did not turn this rage against the officers who imprisoned them; instead, they took their anger out on each other. They had been manipulated to trap themselves in the prison and to feel empowered only when they could dominate someone weaker than they. Those who survived the concentration camps did so because they retained some memory and attachment to the world beyond the camp.

Friedan uses this analogy to suggest that women were more likely to victimize each other than they were to challenge the system that conspired to keep them from being full participants in society. Women who went mad or who committed suicide had lost touch with reality outside of the feminine mystique, just like prisoners in the Nazi camps. Women who "survived" the mystique retained memory of who they were before they conformed.

Of course, American women were not "being readied for mass extermination," but they had suffered "a slow death of mind and spirit." If educated women were unable to "adjust" to their role as housewives, then, according to Friedan, they must have outgrown the role.

The descent of women from boredom into hopelessness was the result of being forced into circumstances that denied their agency in aspiring to a full life of their choosing. Life had been determined for them, as it was for the prisoners of Nazi camps.

By forcing themselves to adjust to the role, women were walking into a concentration camp where they became less than human, vulnerable to outside pressures, and fearful of losing their sexual potency. To escape the "camp," Friedan insists that women needed to "recapture their sense of self" and "begin to grow."

The feminine mystique was the "concentration camp" in which women functioned only as sex objects and consumers. Like the prisoners of Nazi camps, they were marked, but in this case by biological characteristics that doomed them to limited existences.

CHAPTER 13: THE FORFEITED SELF

Women who forfeited their existences to live according to the feminine mystique suffered from the problem that has no name. They adjusted to an image and, in doing so, also "evaded" the freedom that frightened them. Throughout the world, "normal feminine adjustment" entails not realizing the full possibilities of one's existence. The housewife lacked a personal purpose which extended into the future, a purpose that would help her achieve self-realization.

Women who accepted the feminine mystique defined themselves according to their youth and fertility. The "mystique" had convinced women that they had little value beyond what their bodies could offer. Having no other way to identify themselves, women feared getting old, which they thought meant no longer having a purpose.

If the fundamental need is neither that of pleasure or the service of a biological function, but instead the development of one's human nature, then a woman's existence is in danger, despite having lived according to the tenets of femininity which encouraged her to find fulfillment in being a wife and a mother.

American women had obediently done the things that society had expected of them, believing that cooperation would prevent unhappiness when the reality of their lives had proven the opposite.

In American culture, the development of women had been stunted at "the physiological level," with no needs met other than those for love and sexual pleasure. Their needs for strength, self-esteem, achievement, and confidence in their abilities were not met. Being a housewife did not grant women self-esteem because the "occupation" did not allow for the full expression of women's abilities.

Advertisers had tried to convince women that the right household products could help them meet their unmet needs. However, housework was not real work, but, for many women, just a diversion to distract them from feeling as though their lives were going to waste.

Women can never know sexual fulfillment or human love until they achieve their full strength as human beings. The feminine mystique, which granted women the choice between "being a woman" and engaging in human development, limited the range of possibilities.

The "mystique" drew a distinction between womanhood, which was related to biological function and feminine role play, and humanity.

Psychologist A.H. Maslow studied the relationship between sexuality and "dominance feeling," or "self-esteem," among women in the 1930s. He found that the more "dominant," or self-confident, women tended to enjoy their sexualities more. They were not oversexed, but more comfortable with themselves.

Women with higher self-esteem were better able to relax and learn what they liked sexually instead of believing that they were fulfilled through the satisfaction of men.

Maslow found that high-dominance women were not conventionally "feminine" because they felt free to choose how to express themselves. On the other hand, low-dominance women did not break rules. High-dominance women were also less "self-centered' and tended to direct their concerns toward others and "to problems of the world." The low-dominance woman was "other-directed"—that is, she behaved according to others' expectations and, therefore, did not feel as comfortable as the high-dominance woman with getting angry.

"Low-dominance women" felt obligated to fulfill the expectations of femininity which required women to be pleasant and agreeable. Being "other-directed" required the repression of one's true feelings in favor of being "nice" or "polite." Women with high self-esteem believed that their feelings were as valid as those of a man and were based on personal responses, not their gender.

For Maslow, there was a link between "strength of self and sexuality." The problem, though, was that women lived in a society that hardly made self-actualization possible for women, which reduced their likelihood to experience pleasure from love and sex.

Women who felt good about themselves were more likely to experience sexual pleasure, but society encouraged women to focus on their sense of inadequacy, instead.

In American society, love is usually defined as the fusion of egos—"a giving up of individuality rather than a strengthening of it." However, in self-actualizing people, love strengthens individuality. These people are also more likely to be honest and experience intimacy. The feminine mystique had promised women fulfillment through an abdication of selfhood. However, their problems were largely due to the suppression of their beings.

By abdicating selfhood, women formed obsessive and unhealthy attachments to others, particularly their husbands and children, which fostered resentment and threatened their relationships. Women who saw themselves as individuals were more likely to seek love based on their wish to share themselves, not out of a "parasitic" need.

A study by Alfred Kinsey showed that increased freedom for women coincided with an increased ability to reach orgasm. The study also showed that women who had educations beyond college had orgasms "all or almost all" of the times they had sex, while those who had married before the age of twenty were least likely to have orgasms.

Women who were better educated were more likely to know about their bodies and to understand their personalities well enough to know what kind of intimacy they desired. Younger, less self-aware women did not have this advantage.

Women's rights coincided with greater sexual fulfillment for men and women, for they had validated women's subjectivity. The feminine mystique had rendered women as passive objects of a man's sexual pleasure.

Women's rights movements sought to help women see themselves as individuals with valid personal experiences that were separate from others' needs.

Other studies, particularly that by Ernest W. Burgess and Leonard S. Cottrell, showed that women's chances of marital happiness increased when "their career preparation increased." The sociologists found that, the higher a woman's income was at the time of her marriage, the likelier she was to be sexually satisfied.

Women with stable incomes felt self-reliant and valued. Friedan insists that wage-earning is essential to building a woman's self-esteem and independence. With less economic dependence on men, sex was something women could enjoy rather than another form of unpaid labor.

Helene Deutsch, an eminent psychoanalyst, suggested, at a psychoanalytic conference, that maybe "too much emphasis had been put on the orgasm for women" and that, perhaps only "a more diffuse fulfillment" than orgasm was more realistic for women.

It is possible that Friedan is taking Deutsch's comment out of context, but Friedan's point is that the analyst was trying to convince women that sexual pleasure was less important than security in their sex role.

In contexts not concerned with women, analysts believed that passive people who feel empty psychologically and who have not developed "adequate egos" cannot experience orgasms due to fears of "their own non-existence" which are triggered by the loss of control.

If women who had surrendered to the "mystique" were, as Friedan posited, similar to prisoners in a concentration camp, then they would have been too desensitized by their living conditions to experience sexual pleasure.

If sex had a "depressive" quality for some Americans, particularly for the female "sex-seekers," it was because people were using sex as a means to search for a sense of identity. Friedan argues that people are most likely to achieve self-actualization through work and by being in the service "of a human purpose larger than themselves." Work could be seen as "the key to the problem that has no name."

In her definition of work, Friedan acknowledges the value of community service, but insists that women must find paid work, for our capitalist society demonstrates a person's value through money. She does not give as much credence to the notion that women could find great purpose in volunteering.

Traditionally, American women had worked, as pioneers on the frontier, and "beside their husbands in sweatshops and laundries." To European travelers, American women seemed "less feminine" and "childlike" compared to European women due to their willingness to share in work, as well as their participation in education.

Before conforming to the "mystique" Friedan notes that white American women played a more equal role to men—a role which did not permit their infantilization. This willingness to work was unusual among white women because of slavery.

The South African writer Olive Schreiner warned, at the turn of the century, that the "quality and quantity" of women's social functions were decreasing "as fast as civilization was advancing." If women did not share equally in work, their minds would weaken, their offspring would weaken, and, eventually, all of civilization would "deteriorate."

Schreiner had forecast the research that Friedan uncovered in the middle of the twentieth-century. Women who did not work passed their boredom and purposelessness onto their children who would grow into less concerned and less productive citizens.

To break out of the housewife trap, or the "comfortable concentration camp," women could not find their identities through others, but had to find it in work that made use of their capacities. Only that personal commitment could help them fulfill their "unique possibilities" as distinct individuals.

The suburban household, with all of its comforts, stifled personal growth and in some cases created environments in which women died. Their feeling of being trapped in their homes made them unable to enjoy the comforts of these homes.

CHAPTER 14: A NEW LIFE PLAN FOR WOMEN

After years of sitting on an analyst's couch, working out how to adjust to the feminine mystique, by the early 1960s, women had given up and were searching for their senses of identity. Each woman had to create a new life plan based on her own needs.

Psychoanalytic theory, due to its conformity to traditional sex roles, did not offer women the insights they had sought. However, through exploring their psyches, women began to think more about their own needs.

The first step in discovering one's own image was in rejecting the housewife image. Women must also stop thinking that they must choose between a marriage and a career—that was the mistaken choice of the feminine mystique."

Women had to accept that the housewife image was a social construct. They also had to realize that women could have both domestic lives and careers, just as men did.

Women must see housework for the menial labor that it is, not as a kind of career. When a woman stops trying to make chores into "something more," she will be better able to resist "the manipulators" who try to run her life. She will begin to use appliances for what they were intended: to save time.

Housework could not offer the challenge that women sought because it was too simple and appliances could not make it any more interesting. The housewife's dedication to housework revealed the extent to which she believed in a gimmick.

The second step is to stop glorifying marriage and motherhood as the sole and final fulfillments of their lives. Each woman should recognize herself as an individual and not "as a mother with time on her hands." She should use her time to make her own commitment to society, which she can integrate into her commitment to her family.

By thinking of themselves first as "mothers," women were over-identifying with the services they performed for others. This prevented them from thinking about what interested them, beyond the roles they played in their families.

The only way for a woman to find herself is through creative work. She should not merely get a job to help out with family income, for that would be a part of the housewife trap. Due to a lack of work in the suburbs, women often took community service positions, but this work does not use women's intelligences. A woman is better off finding work that pays, that is of value to society, and that requires a commitment.

Friedan discounts the possibility that community service would fulfill women by giving them a creative outlet. She also dismisses the possibility of some women being committed to community service. Friedan defines work within a capitalist framework, which discourages women from valuing volunteer service as they would value paid work.

Dabbling in art and music seemed to be an ideal solution for women, especially since they could practice certain arts, such as ceramics, at home. However, the dabbler cannot gain a sense self from her work because she is not paid. She does not gain any real status or personal identity because she has not done the work of becoming a professional.

Friedan posits that, if a woman uses a minor art, such as ceramics, as a creative outlet, she must be paid. Money would help her to focus on her work and make her aware of competitors in her field. This awareness would push her to produce better art.

Some women who had worked and left their professions believed that they had been away for too long. Others feel guilty about finding work outside of the home.

Both the feminine mystique, which contended that women should stay home, and feelings of inadequacy kept women from working.

The idea of "the happy housewife" doing artistic work at home—painting, sculpting, writing—is one of the "semi-delusions of the feminine mystique." Women, Friedan asserts, are better off working outside the home where they can concentrate uninterrupted and make new friendships.

"Artistic work," as housewives performed it, tended to isolate women and kept women from talking to each other and building relationships. This isolation partly explained why women believed they suffered alone.

Women must resist all social pressures—from magazines, sociologists, psychoanalysts, educators, and clergymen—by saying "no" to the feminine mystique. They must confront the possible sense of threat that their husbands may feel and assert their right to work.

Women had to resist those who had proclaimed themselves authorities on women's lives to learn their own personal truths. Also, they had to contend with their husbands' expectation of their being a constant nurturing presence.

Friedan observed that, in some instances, relationships grew as a result of husbands and wives giving up the feminine mystique. In these cases, men were often relieved to bear less of the financial burden. In other instances, men did not want to give up the fantasy of having "an ever-present mother." If the wife became her true self and stopped acting out the fantasy, then maybe her husband could see her for the person she was. If not, he might be better served by finding "another mother."

Friedan does not discount the possibility that divorce would be favorable in instances in which men expected their wives to fulfill the maternal role. These men were not interested in their wives as fellow human beings; they were interested in them as objects of fantasy who only existed to serve their husbands' needs.

Women who abandoned the "mystique" also faced the possibility of the hostility of other housewives. A woman who lives through her husband and children resents a woman who has her own life, though that resentment masks "a secret envy." "Ambition," like "career," had become a bad word. Women who were ambitious and worked had suffered from "and solved the problem that has no name." Work had made them feel that they were fully a part of the world, as opposed to just making extra money for their families.

Like prisoners in the concentration camp who attack other prisoners instead of the guards, women who felt powerless against the feminine mystique often only felt safe in attacking other women. Because they had dedicated their lives to serving their families and assumed that other women did the same, the presence who made other choices felt like an insult.

Another key to escaping the housewife trap is education. Though some women believed that their educations had ill-prepared them for housewifery, it had actually saved them from some of the more dangerous aspects of the feminine mystique. Still, many women regretted not having taken their educations more seriously and putting them to real use. However, some women found ways of putting their educations to use through various community efforts, including new educational programs, efforts for and against segregated schools, the organization of arts programs and involvement in local politics.

Ambitious women who were still not entirely comfortable with roles outside of the feminine mystique spearheaded community and political efforts that were related to their traditional roles, but that were also connected to some of the most important issues of the day. This was a sly way of getting involved in politics while maintaining the stance of being unpolitical and only interested in the well-being of one's children.

Some women returned to school and pursued graduate study after their children grew up. They went on to earn advanced degrees in the arts, law, medicine, the sciences, and education. Women who did not go to college or those who dropped out to marry took enrichment courses, but they were not satisfactory because they were not serious pursuits of any subject. If a woman wanted to go back to university, she had to demonstrate her seriousness before joining a classroom with teenagers.

By earning advanced degrees, women proved, contrary to the opinions of sex-directed educators, that they were capable of doing the work. Some women still believed that the serious pursuit of education was not for them, while others were too embarrassed to sit in classrooms with students as young as their own children.

The problem that has no name had resulted in a series of social problems, including alcoholism and suicide. The only way to address it was to reshape the model of femininity so that little girls do not grow up wanting to be "just a housewife" but were, instead, offered the same resources as boys to discover their own identities.

The hopelessness that had resulted in these conditions came from trying to fit into a mode of femininity that was sometimes completely unsuitable to the person. Women had accepted the roles that were designed for them instead of creating their own.

To encourage students in the Eisenhower era to take their educations seriously, it was important to have female scholars—both married and unmarried educators—on campus as positive role models. Educators must also say "no" to the feminine mystique and abandon courses, such as "marriage and family."

Female scholars could show young women that there was no shame in being intelligent. This might not have dispelled fears that their intelligence could make men feel inadequate, but it did provide women with female guidance outside of their mothers.

Women who had fallen for the feminine mystique had to be "re-educated." Women who did not go to college or who dropped out needed, according to Friedan, support in the form of a national educational program, similar to the GI bill that would cover tuition fees and other expenses, such as books.

This stipend would allow women who depended on their husbands for income to pursue education without first having to gain the approval of their husbands, who could veto the idea by refusing to help pay.

To fulfill her commitment to a life of her own, women also needed to be involved in politics. In this arena, women could speak out for needs such as maternity leave and child care.

Second-wave feminists wanted state-sponsored childcare to help women pursue education and work without fear of abandoning their children or losing income.

The wasted energy of women is destructive to themselves and to their husbands and children. Who knows, Friedan wonders, what women can be if they are allowed to be their full selves?

The untapped potential of women had not yet been realized because so many were committed to performing an ideal of womanhood.

EPILOGUE

When *The Feminine Mystique* was being prepared for publication, Friedan decided that she would go back to school to earn her PhD, despite having been out of graduate school for twenty years.

Friedan realized that she, too, had made the "mistaken choice" of allowing a man she loved to convince her to give up her ambitions to be his wife.

Friedan got letters from other women who wanted to escape the feminine mystique and pursue their own ambitions, outside of the home. Though it was no longer possible to live as "just a housewife," women wondered how else they could live.

Advertising and other messaging from popular culture had constructed the image of the adult white woman around the model housewife. Furthermore, few, if any, women they knew had jobs.

After *The Feminine Mystique* was released, Friedan became a pariah in her own neighborhood. She realized that she had exposed a problem that women thought they were suffering alone and that reminded them of feelings, in regard to the problem that has no name, which they did not wish to face. Friedan understood that fear because she, too, had experienced her own years of playing "the helpless little housewife" and staying in a bad marriage out of fear of being alone.

A combination of embarrassment at the sense that Friedan had revealed a personal secret and resentment at her success put Friedan at odds with her neighbors. They had made compromises in their lives—marrying and having children young, forgoing their educations—to conform to the "mystique" and did not want others to know how unhappy it had made them.

Conferences were soon held and entire journals were devoted to the subject of "women and their options." A few "exceptional" professional women had encouraged other women to go into continuing-education programs, for they could not really expect to get "real jobs" after fifteen years as homemakers.

Women who had "made it" in male-dominated professions under the assumption that they were exceptions to other women did not want to lose their sense of being special. They also did not want additional competition in their fields.

In 1965, the President's Commission on the Status of Women released a report that detailed wage discrimination and recommended childcare services to make it easier for women to combine work and motherhood.

Women's political mobilization had encouraged the government to examine social concerns that were unique to women, particularly the absence of affordable childcare.

Noted anthropologist Margaret Mead opposed women going to work, asking, who was going "to stay home and bandage the child's knee" and "listen to the husbands' troubles" after he returned home from work? Friedan argues that Mead was committed to other women remaining at home so that she could maintain her status as an "exceptional" woman.

On the subject of women's lives, Mead contradicted herself. She lamented women's "retreat into the cave," or their full dedication to domesticity, but also insisted that they stay there. Her authority rested on the exclusion of other women from her field.

Friedan argued that women (particularly, white, middle-class women) needed a political and social movement like the Civil Rights Movement for black people. Friedan went to Washington, DC after Title VII, which banned sex discrimination in employment, had been passed. The man in charge of enforcing it did not take the legislation seriously. A number of women in government, the press, and labor unions worried that the law would be sabotaged.

While Friedan's call for another feminist movement was an effort to focus on the needs of women, her distinction between the Civil Rights Movement "for black people" and that which would be for feminists, suggested that the movement would focus on the needs of white, middle-class women.

A private conversation between Friedan and a young female lawyer who worked for the agency that would do nothing to enforce Title VII led to the idea to start the National Organization for Women. Friedan co-founded the group with Pauli Murray, a prominent black female lawyer, several female union leaders, and Aileen Hernandez, a member of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission.

Though Friedan distinguished between the Civil Rights Movement and a movement to mobilize women (presumably other white women who had been the targets of the feminine mystique), Friedan formed her organization with two black women, which suggests that the movements were related.

Friedan saw the women's movement as a revolution in sex roles, not as a struggle for race or class equality. She also wanted men to be equal members of the movement, "though women would have to take the lead in the first stage."

Friedan was disinterested in exploring how oppression was different for women of different classes and races. Her privilege as a white, middle-class woman made her think that her experience was the universal experience for women.

Though radicals disliked the capitalist aspects of Friedan's message, she insisted that equality and human dignity would not be possible for women who were incapable of earning income. Women also had to confront their sexual nature, which required them to have access to birth control and safe access to abortion.

Friedan defined autonomy in the context of women's earning power and their ability to make their own reproductive decisions. Furthermore, control over reproduction was essential to a woman's ability to work and to participate as full citizens.

Friedan did not see men as the enemies of women but as fellow victims, "suffering from an outmoded masculine mystique" that had isolated them. Men and women would never really come to know and love each other as long as each remained trapped in their roles.

Men were also playing a sex role defined by a rigid ideal of masculinity which prevented the full range of human expression and which forced men to submerge their personalities in favor of playing a role.

Though the women who started NOW were middle-class, they did not have easy access to money. Housewives could not get money "to fly to board meetings" and women who worked could not get time off from their jobs and did not want to spend time away from their families on the weekend.

Dependency on their husbands kept women from pursuing activism. If money did not prevent them, they felt a sense of guilt, not always unrelated to the "mystique," about not being more available.

Friedan testified before a judge in 1966 regarding a sex discrimination lawsuit against airlines who were forcing flight attendants to resign at age thirty. The underlying reason was that the airlines saved a lot of money by firing the women before they could collect pay increases, vacation time, and pension rights. The flight attendants won the case and hugged Friedan in gratitude for being able to remain in the airline industry past thirty, even after marrying and having children.

The airline lawsuit exposed one of the ways in which companies exploited female labor, as they had in the nineteenth-century. In this instance, however, the "mystique" was used as an excuse, with the assumption that women would be less interested in work when they reached the age at which it was assumed that they would be married with children.

Friedan "felt a certain urgency of history" which encouraged her to pursue the issue of abortion and to push for adding the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution to end officially discrimination in employment opportunities.

Like the suffragists, who were motivated by the abolitionist movement, the fact that black people had won legal rights to equality inspired Friedan and others to pursue the same for women.

Friedan spent the 1960s giving lectures and talks all over the country in a variety of settings: colleges of home economics, Harvard and Yale Universities, lunch at the Oak Room in the Plaza Hotel with fifty members of NOW demanding service from the wait staff, testifying before the Senate against the nomination of a sexist justice, a "rap session" with the National Student Congress, and meetings with women in SDS, or Students for a Democratic Society, who were afraid to speak at meetings out of a fear of turning off men and not getting husbands.

Friedan's notoriety brought her into contact with activists of all ages, including those who were more radical than she. However, she noticed that young women in radical movements played supporting roles and were afraid to do more out of fear that they would ruin their chances of attracting men. Thus, the feminine mystique persisted among the younger generation.

Friedan appreciated bold moves from young radicals, such as protesting the Miss America pageant. However, she opposed those who encouraged man-hating and class warfare. They threatened to take over the New York chapter of NOW and drive out women who wanted "equality but who also wanted to keep on loving their husbands and children."

Friedan agreed with the protest of the pageant due to its reinforcement of ideals of femininity. However, she did not accept that having feminist principles meant abandoning domesticity completely. The feminine mystique had forced women to make that choice.

It became clear to Friedan that "someone' was trying to take over the movement or splinter it. The radicals' focus on sexual politics struck Friedan as absurd. She did not think that "clitoral orgasms" would liberate women by making them less dependent on men sexually.

Only in this one instance in the book does Friedan entertain a conspiracy theory. Her focus on the movement only consisting of women like herself did not allow her to recognize that other perspectives existed.

Some of the "disrupters," she observed, came from extreme left groups looking to "proselytize lesbianism" and others promoted sex and class "warfare" which Friedan believed was based on "obsolete or irrelevant analogies of class warfare or race separatism."

Friedan's homophobia is evident here as well. She did not see lesbians as fellow sufferers in oppression, though some of them had married and had children to conform to the 'mystique.'

On August 26, 1970, NOW organized a march to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, granting women the right to vote. The purpose was to unite women around what Friedan considered to be the most important causes: equal opportunity for jobs and education, the right of abortion and childcare, and women's share of political power.

Though these may not have been the most important causes to all women, Friedan seemed to believe that they were the most feasible goals. They agreed with her belief that women could not include their voices without economic power and control over the number of children they had.

When Senator Eugene McCarthy, the chief sponsor of the Equal Rights Amendment announced his campaign for the presidency, Friedan contacted New York Congresswoman and activist Bella Abzug to ask how she could help McCarthy's campaign.

McCarthy was one of few men in politics who identified with feminists and took an interest in identifying and solving the problems of women. His campaign also included women.

In 1970, she argued that women had a responsibility to help end the war in Vietnam. They had to convince young men going to war that they did not need "to napalm all the children in Vietnam and Cambodia to prove they were men."

In their pursuit of a masculine ideal, young men went to war to demonstrate their maturity.

In Miami in 1972, women played a major role in political conventions for the first time. Feminists won commitments from both parties "on child-care, preschool, and after-school programs." Furthermore, Shirley Chisholm, a Congresswoman from New York, stayed in the race as a presidential candidate "until the end." Friedan predicated that, by 1976, a woman will run for vice-president or president, possibly even on the Republican ticket.

The inclusion of women's issues in political platforms proved that women's issues had gained enough popularity to get the attention of politicians seeking women's votes. Chisholm's presidential run was a bold move, due to her being a black woman. It represented the recent successes of both the Civil Rights and feminist movements.

The agenda for what Friedan called "Stage 1 of the sex-role revolution" had been accomplished. The ERA had passed Congress, the Supreme Court had ruled that no state had the right to refuse a woman an abortion, and companies had to "take affirmative action" to end sex discrimination" and other issues that kept women out of leadership positions.

For Friedan, the first steps toward freedom had been taken, but the work of undoing learned sex roles would be an ongoing project. By including more women in every aspect of society, those roles could more effectively be challenged through increased visibility.

Friedan had also been asked to organize groups in Europe, South America, and Asia. She was hoping to have the first world conference of feminists in Sweden in 1974. Friedan believed that "the man-hating" element of the feminist movement would evaporate and did not exclude the possibility that they were "a planned diversion."

Friedan did not see the feminist movement solely within an American context, but rather as a global movement. She expected that when women saw the issues they had in common, they would join a common political effort. "Man-hating" was a petty distraction.

Just as liquor sellers had lobbied against the Nineteenth Amendment, Friedan believed that there was a campaign to 'block the ERA." Employers in Ohio gave women a week off to cross the Kentucky border and protest against the amendment to pressure the Kentucky state legislature. Friedan did not see this as a conspiracy of men, but a manipulation of "the fears and impotent rage of passive women" by profiteers.

Women, who had probably been paid by their employers to participate sometimes fought against reforms that would improve their lives, both due to pressure from men in their lives and fear of what the changes would mean. Conservative women were partially responsible for the failure of the ERA.

Friedan realized that she could not encourage others' freedom without realizing her own, so she got divorced in May 1969. She became a visiting professor of sociology at Temple University and continued to write.

Friedan realized that one's personal life was political. She could not encourage women to stop stunting their development in favor of conforming to constrictive gender roles if she was doing the same.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Sutton, Mary. "*The Feminine Mystique.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 8 Apr 2018. Web. 18 Oct 2019.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Sutton, Mary. "*The Feminine Mystique.*" LitCharts LLC, April 8, 2018. Retrieved October 18, 2019. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-feminine-mystique.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Feminine Mystique* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Friedan, Betty. The Feminine Mystique. W.W. Norton. 1963.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Friedan, Betty. The Feminine Mystique. New York: W.W. Norton. 1963.